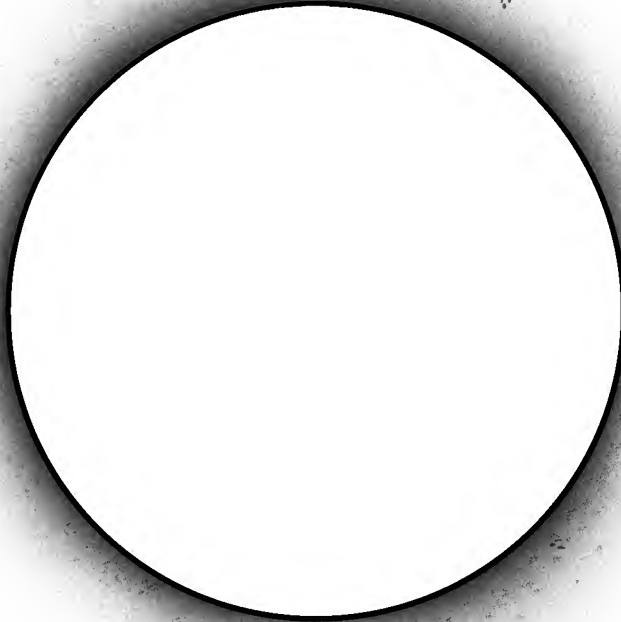


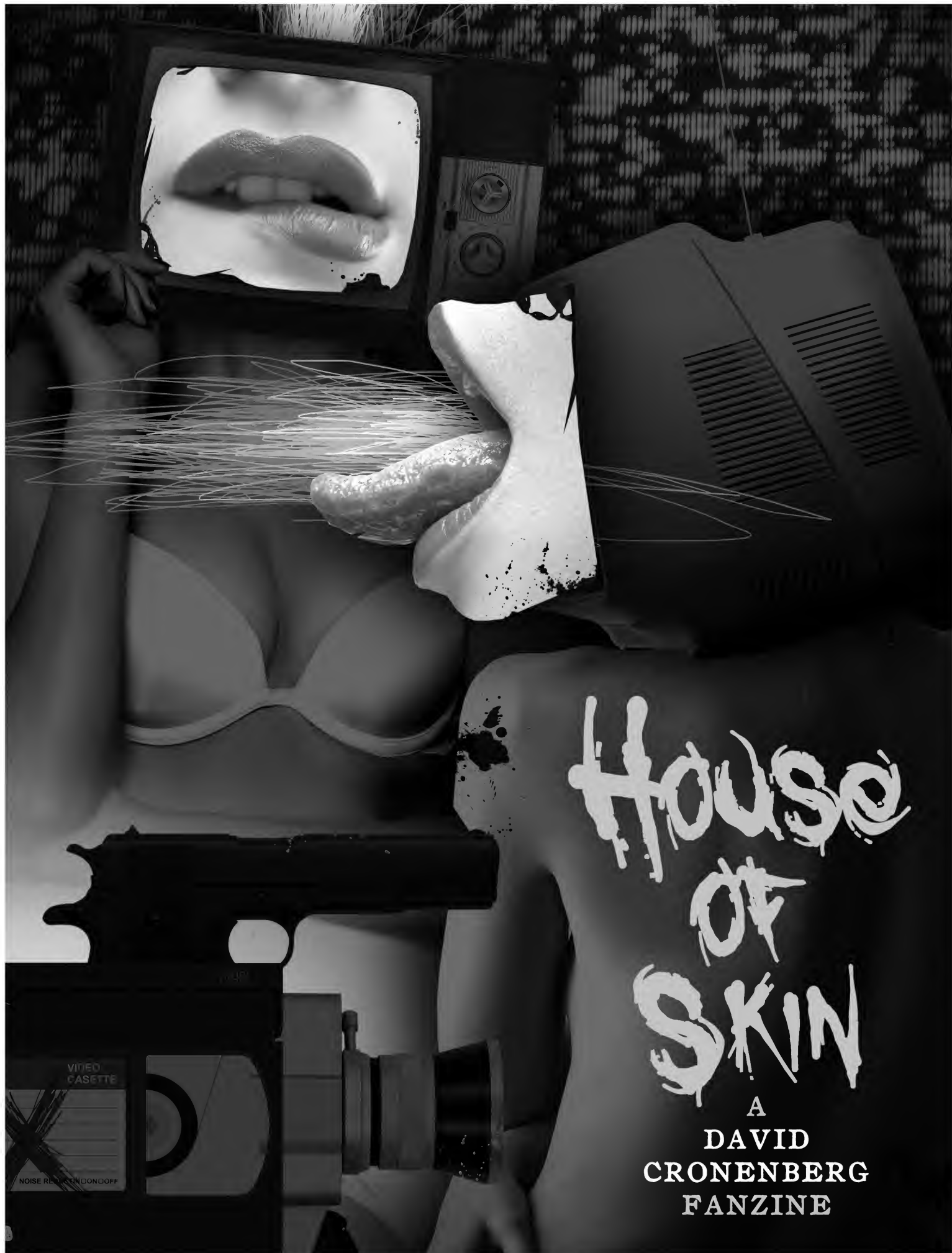
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Stereo
Crimes of the Future
Shivers
Rabid
Fast Company
The Brood
Scanners
Videodrome
The Dead Zone
The Fly
Dead Ringers
Naked Lunch
M. Butterfly
Crash
eXistenZ
Spider
A History of Violence
Eastern Promises
A Dangerous Method
Cosmopolis
Maps to the Stars





House of SKIN

A
DAVID
CRONENBERG
FANZINE

Favorite Cronenberg Film: Crash (1996)

Last Sanctuary

By William D. Prystauk aka "Billy Crash"

David Cronenberg's name resonates in the horror realm because his fear-laden features are well-crafted. They move beyond trope-filled slashers and gore fests to showcase vibrant, thematic stories inhabited by strong and relatable characters.

But Cronenberg goes one step further than many horror writer/directors, and that's why he's a standout in the genre, and why he'll be remembered in the long term – even if some don't note his unique twist on terror from the beginning.

One of the most poignant elements to any horror is that of a sanctuary. For at some point, our hero or heroes search for a place to escape to or to stage a counter attack from or to simply hide until daybreak. To make a tale of terror really work on an audience's collective psyche, the best stories seem to incorporate that hero's most fateful sanctuary: the home. After all, if you're already in the comfort and safety of where you kick off your sneakers, why go anywhere else? And this allows the audience to connect with the narrative as they imagine what they would do to survive in their own abode. But when the home, that protective womb, comes under attack, it may become a torture chamber or a tomb, leaving the hero in trouble and despair like never before, and bringing a greater sensation of fear to viewers. That's because, there's nowhere else to go. No place to run to. And for many, this may seem like the last sanctuary.

It isn't.

And this is why Cronenberg stands out from the rest.

The last sanctuary is the hero's body.

"Body horror" is often attributed to Cronenberg, but it deserves more than serving as a trite moniker. Characters are not simply under attack from parasites, or internal cells altered with that of a common housefly, or micro-phalluses hidden within armpits. There's something far deeper at play that makes Cronenberg's horror films even more unsettling and horrific.

For Max Renn (James Woods), he can't find refuge in his apartment or even his place of employment in 1983's *Videodrome*, but that's of little consequence because Max's body's under siege by a video-based virus. From watching too much *Videodrome*, his world becomes surreal and Max can't distinguish fact from fiction until both worlds collide, and the notion becomes irrelevant. What remains relevant is that his body has become a vessel for *Videodrome* to do its bidding and wreak havoc on human targets. When he's "reprogrammed" by Bianca Oblivion (Sonja Smits), his body's used as a weapon once more, this time against those who infected him with the video signal. But he's spent, exhausted, the law's on its way, and Max's cathode

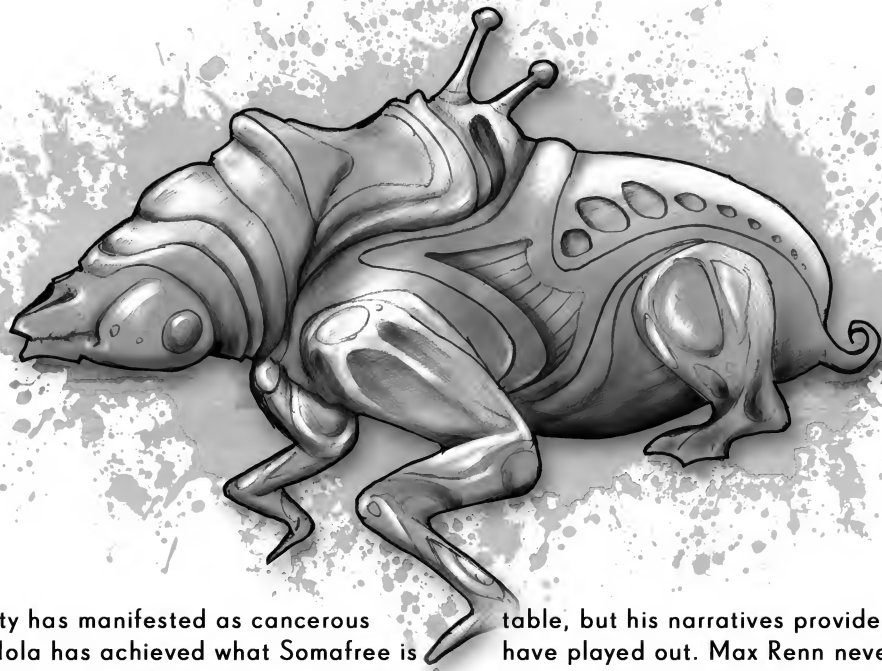
ray's fading fast. In the end, it may seem as if he's won since he's slain those who used and abused him, but he has nowhere to go and holds up in a condemned tug boat.

A tug's the tow truck of the harbor, a "worker bee" service vehicle that does the heavy lifting. Like the tug, Max has been used up and "condemned" after playing puppet to his now dead puppet masters. Whether from his own imagination or from *Videodrome*, his only escape is one of self-murder. He can't run from his own body, but he can set his soul free. "Death to Videodrome! Long live the new flesh!" becomes a short-lived battle cry because at story's end, his flesh, his sanctuary, won't and can't last, and Max Renn, meaning "Greatest Rebirth," achieves just that with a bullet to the brain.

There's a fight for humanity in *Scanners* when Cameron Vale (Stephen Lack), a derelict with a unique and destructive psychic ability, is selected to stop Darryl Revok (Michael Ironside) from trying to take over the world. This may sound silly to an extent, but Revok's arrogance goes a long way to say the least. The important factor: Regardless if one is a scanner or just part of the human herd, one can't hide from such a direct psychic onslaught. *Scanners* can attack at will and adjust their mental power to bring about seizures, increase heart rates, unleash spontaneous human combustion, instill paralysis, or even make heads explode. Hence, Revok's mad scientist plan.

Like *Videodrome*, 1981's *Scanners* leaves no place for people to hide, and if one doesn't take care to protect his or her sanctuary – the body – all is lost. Vale discovers this when he and Revok battle to the end in a steel cage scanner match. Vale's body's left charred and hollow, but the soul has jumped into Revok. Our hero has a new body and a new look. But what happens next? Vale may think he's won, but inhabiting Revok's body allows him to assume command of the company that will unleash ephemeral and create a young scanner army. The real fight may be on since he's the strongest scanner and went from being a transient to now having all the best things. He's on top of the food chain. Vale can hide in a new body – and maybe possess others as necessary. He can become the ultimate chameleon, the ultimate concealed weapon, and we're left to wonder if absolute scanner power will corrupt. (Long live the new flesh?)

"Raglan encourages my body to revolt against me. And it did. I have a small revolution on my hands and I'm not putting it down very successfully," says Jan Hartog (Robert A. Silverman) in Cronenberg's disturbing *The Brood* from 1979. Here, the body is a final fig leaf of sorts and human rage finds itself center stage. Dr. Hal Raglan (Oliver Reed) helms the Somafree Institute, where he encourages patients' anger to manifest as something "other" than curses, screams, and panic attacks, and they now take shape on the skin as tumors or blotches, or in the case of Nola Carveth (Samantha Egger), she gives birth to her rage as asexual, murderous children.



Where Hartog's hostility has manifested as cancerous tumors on his throat, Nola has achieved what Somafree is all about: freeing the body. But Nola's rage isn't one and done because she keeps bringing forth children and creates a brood of short, hostile killing machines. And their birth is a visceral one: The brood comes from an external sack Nola must bite through to set her monster babies free. And like an animal, she licks them clean before unleashing them upon the world. This is the base emotion of anger made real. (Long live the new flesh, again?)

Before being destroyed, the brood attacks Nola's real birth daughter, Candy (Cindy Hinds), who's traumatized by the ordeal. Like the virus in *Videodrome* and the use of ephemeral in *Scanners*, lumps appear on her arm indicating a new rage being born.

Humanity is its own virus and to free ourselves from arrogance and rage, we must leave our husks behind. This may make Cronenberg's films seem "one-note" or even predic-

table, but his narratives provide other ways for the story to have played out. Max Renn never had to watch the video, Cameron Vale never had to fight his brother head on, and if Nola had only gone to another doctor... But Cronenberg's films have more depth than that, and there are certainly other themes to excavate. Even in this context, the lesson to be learned may be: Don't be arrogant and don't give into rage, or that engaging internal conflict will only lead to self-annihilation.

In Cronenberg's films, there is no escape. No safe haven. The self, the true and only sanctuary, is left wide open to attack from the power of the mind. From emotion. And if one of his main heroes employs logic, that character will eventually succumb to emotion anyway. This makes for "hopeless horror" because there is no place to go. When a Cronenberg horror begins, there's no way out for the characters, hero or villain alike. Regardless of money or power or desire, they will all fall victim from within, and the last sanctuary, the body, will be manipulated, converted, and ultimately destroyed.



Billy Crash on Twitter:
@crashpalace

Art by Demeter Lorant
<http://demeter-lorant.format.com>

"Cronenberg's first 'unpredictable peak' emerges in his student film, *From the Drain*. An organic military weapon kills a soldier, throwing into question his current mission but sparing another who has no such doubts. Often read as a political text, the film is equally an existentialist intervention: the soldiers' moral superiority has no bearing on the weapon's behaviour" — TIFF's Cronenberg Museum 1

The second student film from Canadian body-horror auteur David Cronenberg, *From the Drain* (1967), is nothing short of absurd and experimental; a foreshadowing of the dystopian futures that would dominate the first 15 or so years of his career such as *Scanners*, *Videodrome* and *The Brood*. Seemingly constructed from Dymo labelling and gaffer tape — not literally but notably spartan in its art direction — one could assume every cent of the \$500 budget was sunk into 16mm film stock and lab processing. While low-budget productions, and the limitations that come therein, are almost mandatory for students, few reveal the level of creativity within restriction, budget or otherwise, that a young Cronenberg does.

From the Drain is a 14-minute long, one-set story that features two clothed men in a bathtub, knees up around their armpits. There are no personal items or establishing decoration in this bathroom, merely a used cake of soap and little else. Despite the two men wedged up against each other, they are strangers, evidenced by one man (Mort Ritts), who I will refer to as 'Mr Moustache' for ease of identification, opening the dialogue somewhat facetiously with: "Do you come here often?"

With effete affectation, Mr Moustache says he's looking for "The Disabled War Veterans' Recreation Centre" (an early example of Cronenberg's penchant for coming up with colourful names for organisations²), although the implication is that it is a mental institution for returned soldiers from an unspecified conflict. He salaciously fingers the bathtub taps and faucet throughout the entire exchange



FROM THE (1967) DRAIN

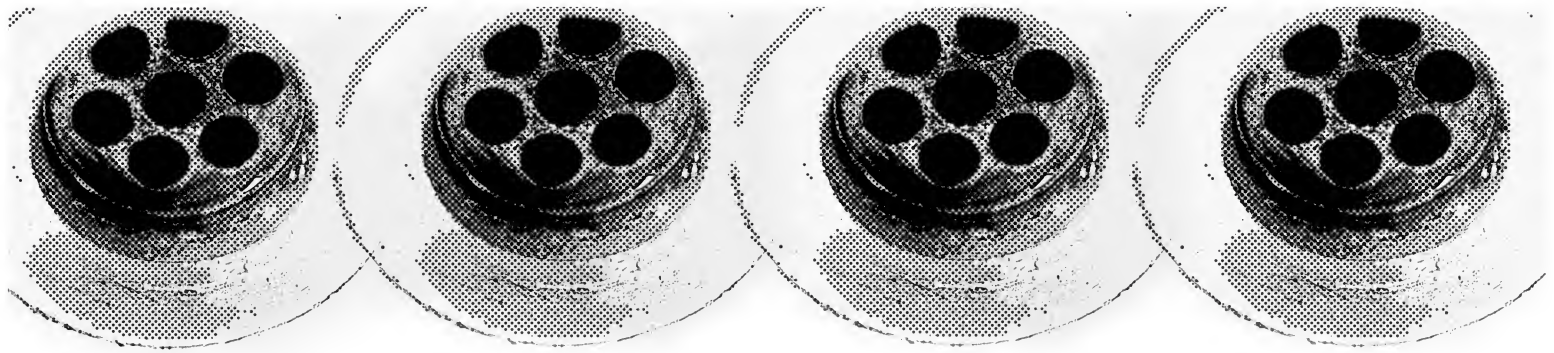
by Emma Westwood

admitting he's looking for companionship and "a little affection even" but he always gets partnered with "speechless idiots", referring to his new tub buddy (who I will refer to as Mr Silent Type).

Clasping his hands gleefully, Mr Silent Type (Stephen Nosko) is clearly obsessed with the plughole, over which Mr Moustache is crouched. He finally breaks his silence with the single word "tendrill" and admits to believing it would be best if they put the plug in. According to Mr Silent Type, they need not be concerned about what goes down the drain but what will come up from it. Given Cronenberg's forthcoming propensity for the viscerally morbid, this serves as possibly the first instance of 'Cronenbergian' horror expressed explicitly in dialogue, conjuring images of the parasites from *Shivers* or the armpit worm from *Rabid*.

Paranoia now bubbles as an undercurrent, and the two men argue as to their real identities: chemical and biological weapons expert? Recreational Program Director? Undercover agent? Mr Moustache says, "Nothing ever comes from the drain, it all comes from your mind", concisely summarising Cronenberg's ongoing creative agenda of mixing the physiological and the psychological, which runs through nearly all of his films, even up to today. Their banter and switching of authority continues until the paranoia manifests itself in a stop-motion tendrill monster that rises from the S-bend to kill one of them.

A jaunty classical guitar track, delicately baroque in nature, is overlaid as an audio soundtrack across the entire film, acting as the light to the elemental shade of the story. It is particularly effective when its happy trills play out against the plug attack of the tendrill monster. At this early stage in Cronenberg's career, he demonstrates powerful proficiency in creating storytelling counterpoint. Even the 'dandyness' of Mr Moustache and his casual pickup bar conversation could not be further removed from the gravity of chemical warfare, existential angst and what is now broadly recognised as PTSD (although tackled here by Cronenberg in a prophetic manner) that sits as the thematic heart of this film.



Within these contrasts is the humour that dominates *From the Drain*, notable also in Cronenberg's first short film, *Transfer* (1966), where a patient tracks down and confronts his former psychoanalyst. The subject matter of both films might not sound comedic but, that's the funny thing, they are funny – or, at the very least, intellectually amusing. This evidences Cronenberg's innate understanding of form and function.

Despite rarely being regarded as a humourist across the duration of his career, the 'wickedly funny' does play a huge role across Cronenberg's oeuvre.³ Even as a student, and confined within the short film format, Cronenberg opted to use comedy to create audience rapport quickly within a tight timeframe. Both horror and comedy share similar qualities in terms of emotionally engaging an audience rapidly, whereas drama requires screen-time to develop meaningful attachment to characters. The fact that Cronenberg chose humour over horror indicates he is unfairly pigeonholed as a 'horror filmmaker' and, arguably, actually scaring people figures very lowly in his storytelling priorities; it's more about psychological abstraction. Ethical conundrums, questions around morality and existential dilemmas are the dominant themes that colour and define his work, even when making *From the Drain*.⁴

It is important to remember that *From the Drain* is still a student film and, therefore, an experimental study in the cinematic artform. It could likely be better executed by a more experienced filmmaker, and that means a more experienced David Cronenberg too. Within the avant-garde nature of this film, its surreality and figurative diegesis – a common employ of students in pushing creative boundaries and finding their own 'voice' – shows Cronenberg was not immune to the filmmaking zeitgeist of the 1960s, in which students the world over were most influenced by the French New Wave (film commentator Kim Newman posits a more direct link to Alain Resnais⁵).



Where *From the Drain* falls down is in its technical execution, and possible print deterioration over the passing decades, despite the Toronto International Film Festival's recent restoration effort for the 2016 Arrow Video Blu-ray release *David Cronenberg's Early Works*. The echoing of the sound recording and harsh, perfunctory lighting make the dialogue and narrative difficult to interpret, let alone penetrate, which means it needs to be replayed a couple of times in order to grasp the story thread. Cronenberg works in a dialogue-heavy fashion in these early years, an approach that defines his first feature films *Stereo* (1969) and *Crimes of the Future* (1970) too, so if dialogue is inaudible then a massive chunk of the film's thrust gets lost.

TIFF's Cronenberg Museum admits *From the Drain* is often "read as a political text" and there are definite correlations to John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) in its intrigue, conspiracy theory and narrative layers. More than anything, though, *From the Drain* is an illuminating case of retrospection, whereby we get to see a fledgling master discovering his craft, honing his approach and sketching the broad outline of a career that would go on to combine the physical and psychological in an unparalleled manner.

Endnotes

1 Sourced from TIFF's Cronenberg Museum <http://cronenbergmuseum.tiff.net/> 8 February 2017

2 Other examples: *Canadian Academy for Erotic Inquiry* (*Stereo*, 1969), *House of Skin* (*Crimes of the Future*, 1970) and *The Cathode Ray Mission* (*Videodrome*, 1983).

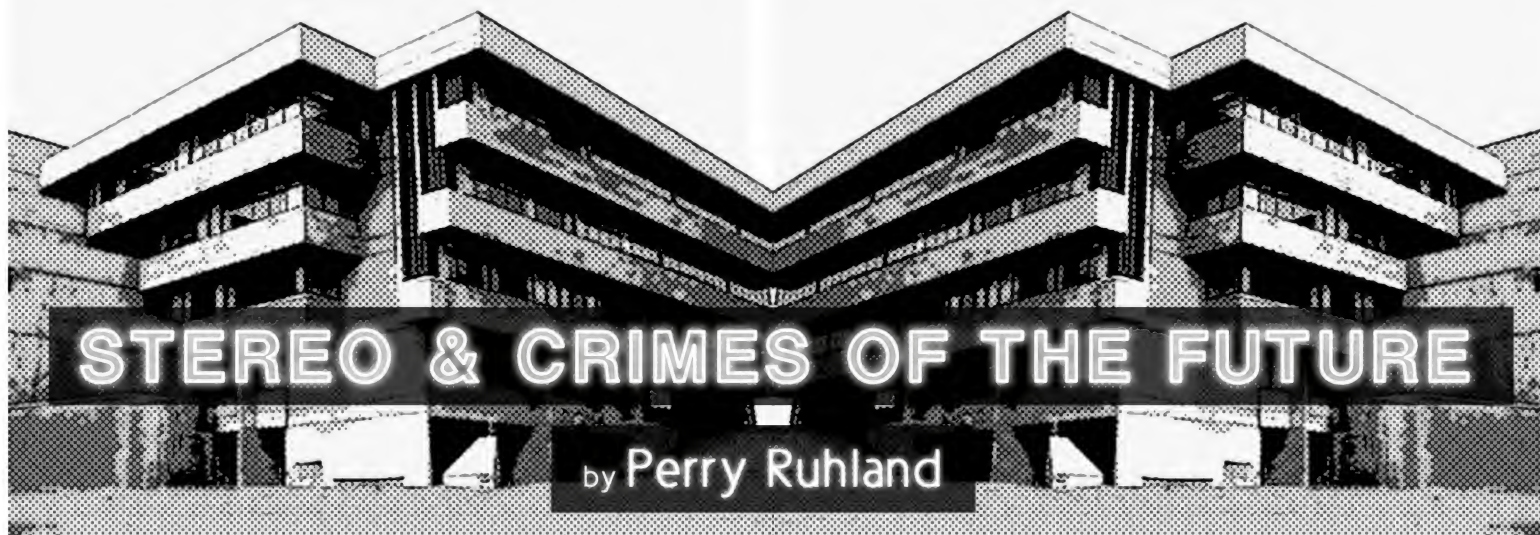
3 For example, in *Videodrome*, it is difficult not to derive amusement when VHS cassettes start to pulsate, James Woods develops a vagina dentata in his belly-button and Debbie Harry's lips balloon out from a plasticised TV screen like some sort of lip monster.

4 Films such as *Dead Ringers* (1989), *M. Butterfly* (1993) *Crash* (1996) while depicting events that could be called 'horrific' are not entries into a horror canon. Across the past 20 years, Cronenberg has largely directed films that could be loosely classified as dramas and/or thrillers such as *A History of Violence* (2005), *A Dangerous Method* (2011) and *Maps to the Stars* (2014).

5 Taken from the Special Feature recorded exclusively for Arrow Video's 2016 Blu-ray release *David Cronenberg's Early Works*, where critic and author Kim Newman discusses Cronenberg's early works.

This piece was first published in the online film journal *Senses of Cinema* in March 2017 and republished with permission...

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2017/1967/from-the-drain-david-cronenberg-1967>



David Cronenberg was my first favorite director. Even before I knew what a director did, or before I'd seen more than a grand total of two of his films, I knew this to be true. Seeing his name above both *The Fly* and *Videodrome* was enough for me to realize that there was something special about this one, and every film I'd subsequently watch would only help enforce that, diving me deeper and deeper into nightmare worlds of body transformation and sexual obsession. But every director has to start somewhere—and with Cronenberg, that “somewhere” is two brief feature films, micro-budget experimental movies that help lay the groundwork for some of the greatest works from one of cinema's greatest artists.

His first feature, *Stereo* (1969), is something of an independent miracle. Running only a little over an hour, *Stereo* was made on a shoestring budget in one location with a camera that was too loud to properly record audio and an almost nonexistent cast and crew. Yet, even with all these limitations and completely without the luxury of his signature body horror special effects, *Stereo* still manages to be a perfect example of the wonderful career to come.

The film functions as an educational account of the fictitious studies conducted in the hallowed halls of the “Canadian Academy of Erotic Enquiry,” where scientists probe the secrets of the mind. The particular case study featured in *Stereo* was a study by the unseen Dr. Luther Stringfellow, who surgically altered eight willing test subjects (one of whom is played by Cronenberg regular Ronald Mlodzik) to grant them telepathic abilities. Of course, there's a catch—all psychics need to develop their powers, which is done through constant sexual experimentation, exploration, and interaction. This process is referred to as “the sociochemistry of the erotic,” which might be the single most Cronenbergian sentence ever written.

It's easy to see how a movie that's functionally about omnisexual psychics developing their powers through psychic orgies would become nothing more than a skin flick or grindhouse roughie, but Cronenberg puts the concept to great use. There is a very clear line in the film between the development of the subjects' sexual encounters and their mental

prowess, building up to omnisexual orgies so powerful they shatter psyches. Yet Cronenberg never lets the film's clinical, controlled gaze falter, capturing even the most explicit scenes like they're nothing more than sterile interiors.

As I mentioned earlier, the camera Cronenberg used to shoot the film was so loud that it was impossible to properly record audio, so the storytelling takes a different turn. Instead of following the events of the study as they happened, the film is narrated by a host of different scientists recounting Stringfellow's experiments with footage of the subjects playing out silently on screen, free of dialogue or diegetic sound. The scientists all seem to have different specialties on the case, and as such, all of them recount the story in different ways, all of which barrel towards the same horrifying ending. It's a novel approach to proceedings that easily sidesteps the camera's limitations, as well as adding to the clinical tone that would go on to become one of Cronenberg's staples.

Another limitation that adds to this unique atmosphere is the way Cronenberg uses the setting. Since Cronenberg had attended the University of Toronto years before, he decided to stick with the familiar and shoot the film entirely within the institution. While one could see this being a problem—college campuses are scarcely known for looking like sterile experimental facilities—Cronenberg shoots the university in a way that manages to capture both a unique geography and a perfectly sterile, clinical aesthetic. In fact, the Canadian Academy of Erotic Enquiry is visually striking and believable enough to function as a character of its own, and a damn memorable one at that.

Still, the highest high of *Stereo* doesn't come from the plot, the setting, or even the impeccable narration. No, *Stereo*'s soul rests in its pacing, unfolding like a marriage between a hypnotic tone poem and a dry educational video. The film just flows from one scene to the next with very little physical action happening, creating a vibe that makes it feel more like a special interest documentary than a narrative feature. It's a structure that can easily be isolating to most viewers, but if you can gel with it, the entire film just opens itself up to you, making the brief runtime feel like an eternity in the best possible way.

It's this touch that makes the experience of watching Stereo really unlike watching any other Cronenberg film. It's a movie that's aggressively academic about a science that doesn't exist, and when combined with long diatribes about omnisexuality ("the true norm, an expanded form of bisexuality"), it's clear why a viewer would bounce off Stereo hard. But to do so would be to miss out, because Stereo is not only one of the most fascinating Cronenbergs from a historical perspective, it's his most fascinating from a formal perspective as well.

A year after Stereo, Cronenberg gave the feature film another stab with *Crimes of the Future*, a spiritual successor to Stereo. Much like Stereo, it's a film with no diegetic sound or dialogue, following a scientist as he makes observations on the world around him. Unlike Stereo, however, *Crimes of the Future* is meant to be seen less as a scientific document and more as a series of diary entries, swapping out multiple narrators for one man: Adrian Tripod (Ronald Mlodzik).

Adrian is a scientist and the head of a dermatology clinic menacingly named The House of Skin. The institution is sparse, consisting of only Adrian, two interns, and a single male patient, but unlike Stereo's Canadian Academy of Erotic Enquiry, the explanation behind the lack of people in The House of Skin is bone-chillingly sinister. A mysterious disease known only as Rouge's Malady was spread through cosmetic products, and quickly spread around the world, mysteriously picking off the planet's entire population of sexually mature women, leaving only boys, men, and young girls left alive. During the plague, the man who discovered it, Adrian's mentor, Anton Rouge, vanished, and Adrian takes it upon himself to track the man down, leading him through the darkest parts of plague-devastated Canada.

While Stereo was Cronenberg developing the psychosexual side of his work, *Crimes of the Future* fleshes it out with his other infamous trademark: sickening body horror of the highest caliber. Rouge's Malady causes mysterious white foam to flow from victims' orifices (helpfully dubbed "Rouge's Foam"), and the disease soon leads to bleeding and mysterious fluids pouring from the eyes. Given the budget, the effects aren't anywhere near on par with the horrific sights of *The Fly*, *Videodrome*, or *Scanners*, but when you have mysterious white goo oozing from someone's ear, you don't need the greatest effects in the world to be gross.

Helping work around the budget is the fact that the grisliest bits of body horror are saved for narration. Like Stereo before it, *Crimes of the Future* uses the narration to not only tell the main story, but to give the briefest glimpses at worlds too fantastical for the film's resources. It's a clever trick, but there's one big problem: Ronald Mlodzik's narration is bad. Really bad. It's stuck in a limbo between the professional, matter-of-fact presentation of Stereo's narrators and a traditional monologue, filled with needless breathy pauses and a vocabulary that fits his character, but distracts from the otherwise gritty tone of the film. He acts like he belongs in the world of Stereo, and instead of creating a neat dissonance, all it does is distract.

This is a problem that runs through nearly every frame of *Crimes of the Future*. It really, really wants to be Stereo 2.0, even when that's at odds with its own story and content. The narrator's tones don't fit, the lingering pace doesn't fit, and the examination of non-heterosexual orientations goes nowhere, ending up seeming cruder than it feels the film would like it to be viewed.

Now, none of this is to say *Crimes of the Future* is worthless compared to Stereo, or even that it's just a rehash, because it's not. In fact, when *Crimes of the Future* does its own thing, the results are quite remarkable. The focus on giving the film more clearly defined characters as well as a constant POV helps ground the film in its world, and gives the plot actual stakes beyond the scientific curiosity of unseen doctors. Plus, a wider variety of fascinating locations are used, and the addition of color really helps make the more visually striking locations (such as a lobby filled with glowing neon boards) stand out.



But when you get down to it, the biggest, most important change *Crimes of the Future* makes from Stereo is where it chooses to go. While I will not divulge into spoilers, *Crimes of the Future* takes a turn in the third act to tackle subject matter Cronenberg hadn't dared explore before and reasonably hasn't approached since. I can't say with confidence that he actually handles the taboo as well as the story needed, but it's certainly disconcerting, and really hammers home the film's hopeless, crushing atmosphere when it matters most.

Unlike Stereo, *Crimes of the Future* isn't a great film, but it's certainly a fine one and helps set up themes that would later be explored in titles like *Shivers*, *Rabid*, and *The Brood*. Yet, much to my disappointment, the narration would never carry over to another film, leaving just Stereo and *Crimes of the Future* as Cronenberg's two solely narrated features. While it's a disappointment he'd never touch the format again, the two films that did use the format certainly stood out in their time, and still stand out today. For better or worse, Stereo and *Crimes of the Future* both represent Cronenberg at his most experimental, and are essential pieces of an essential director's filmography. Don't let them pass you by.

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SHIVERS (1975) ^{by} Michael E. Wilson

aka THEY CAME FROM WITHIN

In 1975 fledgling film maker David Cronenberg made his inaugural feature. For reasons known only to himself (and I sincerely hope it stays that way), Mr. Cronenberg chose as his subject genetically altered parasites that, upon entering the human body, turn said human into a violent, insatiable sex maniac. Then these adorable, slimy little creatures are passed on from body to body, presumably destined to turn human society into a never ending sex orgy. The original title of this pleasant little production was THE PARASITE MURDERS. When released, the film was known alternately as SHIVERS, THEY CAME FROM WITHIN, and by its French title, FRISONS.

The story takes place in a high rise apartment complex, the Starliner, which is located on an island just minutes away from the city of Montreal. As the film opens, we are being taken on a tour of the complex. A droning male voice describes the amenities of the complex as a series of photographs flash on the screen. We see the modern (for 1975) decor and furnishings, the common areas, and the shops and medical facilities on the ground floor. Then a young couple enter the building to look at an apartment. They are met at the entrance by a rather weird looking manager. As they are beginning their tour, the scene changes to a violent confrontation between a young woman and an older man in one of the units. The man is Dr. Hobbes, one of the creators of the parasite. He had used the woman as a guinea pig by implanting her with the parasite. But the experiment has gotten out of control and he has decided to kill the woman and himself and destroy the parasites before they start spreading. But Hobbes doesn't know that the woman has been sexually active with several men in the complex who now are infected as well.

This opening sequence is very unsettling as the film switches back and forth between the brutality in the woman's apartment and the conversation between the young couple and the manager. Cronenberg wastes no time showing us a world in decay and disorder, as the tranquil, antiseptic environment of the complex is shown as a thin veneer which barely conceals the ugliness going on behind locked doors.

We also learn that director Cronenberg is not going to hold anything back visually. The disgusting murder/suicide is shown in as much glorious detail as he was able to get away with. Blood is in ample supply. And we are soon treated to the appearances of the parasites themselves, slithering their way around the building and grounds. They look like small pieces of raw meat that somehow can move. Delicious. But not nearly as amusing as the man-made chickens in ERASERHEAD (1977). One infected man vomits a parasite from a balcony and the little devil lands on a plastic umbrella carried by an old lady. It lands with an audible

"splat" and then crawls off into the brush seeking its next host.

While all of these marvelous cinematic adventures are entertaining the viewer, Dr. Hobbes' partner, having discovered what Hobbes had been doing, contacts the Starliner's resident physician, Dr. St. Luke, about the danger. The two men try to catch and destroy the parasites before they become unstoppable. In the meantime, we are treated to scene after scene of different residents of the building being infected by parasites jumping out of washing machines into their faces, or assaulted by already infected neighbors. While some of these scenes have elements of dark humor, most of them are quite ugly, especially when children are involved.

The most ostentatious infection happens to a gorgeous Lesbian named Betts, who receives the parasite while lounging in a bathtub sipping a glass of wine. The enterprising little critter comes up through the drain and swims its way through the water between the lady's spread legs and enters her body.

Betts is portrayed by veteran actress Barbara Steele, who adds name value to a largely unknown cast of actors. Steele had been a major star of European films during the 1960s, many of them stylish Gothic horror films (BLACK SUNDAY, THE HORRIBLE DR. HICHCOCK, etc.). She brings considerable dramatic and sensual flair to this role. Her other major scene involves a Lesbian kiss (more explicit than a similar kiss in DANZA MACABRA aka CASTLE OF BLOOD in 1964) during which one of the parasites is seen leaving her throat and entering the throat of her partner. Miss Steele would later praise Cronenberg as a director while calling him the man who introduced gynecology to the horror film.

David Cronenberg firmly establishes his style with this impressive first effort. I have to hand it to the man. He manages to get his point across extremely well. He is showing us a society in decay and out of control, living solely for unlimited sexual pleasure and conquest. How appropriate that he would make this film in the middle of the 1970s, the era where the sexual revolution of the previous decade was at long last celebrating its ultimate victory with the spread of the free love, one-night-stand, drug infused, contraceptive sexual culture that was finding growing acceptance in mainstream Western society. Cronenberg was certainly trying to make a statement, but he couldn't possibly have known how prescient his statement was. Dark and disturbing throughout, SHIVERS ends with a celebration of cynicism and hopelessness.

Michael is here -><https://letterboxd.com/grey1951>

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Drive-in
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one minute
they're
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THE NEXT
RABID
The most
terrifying
you have
ever seen
...you can't
trust your
mother
...your best
friend
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DEMON!
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SEXUAL NUDITY
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RABID (1977) ^{by} Bill Van Ryn

David Cronenberg's 1977 *Rabid* was only the director's second full length theatrical release, yet it remains one of his most memorably bizarre plots, and one of his most uncompromisingly bleak visions. He'd already blended elements of sex and horror in his previous film *Shivers*, in which residents of an isolated apartment community gradually all succumb to a gruesome slug-like parasite that turns its hosts into mindless sexually compulsive zombies. *Rabid* covers similar territory, although with a few new twists to make it even more uncomfortable.

Adult film star Marilyn Chambers made a sensation with her appearance in 1972 breakthrough porn film *Behind The Green Door*, but *Rabid* was the first non-porn film that she did afterwards. *Green Door* is considered to be one of the finer examples of the artistic possibilities for adult films, but Chambers had no speaking lines in it, and it still remained to be seen if she could pull off the necessary acting required for the lead character in *Rabid*. It turns out that even though the character she's playing is nearly as thin as one from an adult movie, Chambers is authentic and convincing in the role of Rose, a young woman who is in a motorcycle accident with her boyfriend, Hart. The accident happens in a rural area, with only a plastic surgery clinic nearby for Rose to get the medical attention she needs.

At the clinic, Dr. Keloid performs emergency surgery on Rose, employing an experimental technique he has been developing using treated skin grafts. The grafts are intended to adapt to the body wherever they are applied, but instead they cause a strange mutation to develop in Rose's body. After lying in a coma for many weeks at the Keloid clinic, Rose awakens and instinctively attacks another patient using a new organ that has grown inside her body. It emerges from a sphincter in her armpit, revealing itself to be a phallic-looking tube with a stinger on the end that Rose uses to puncture her victims and withdraw their blood. Although Rose attempts to feed on a cow, she vomits and realizes the blood she consumes must be human. Her victims, although usually not killed by the experience, are infected with an unknown disease similar to rabies that Rose is carrying, and the disease quickly turns them into murderous zombies who infect others by biting them. Rose herself is immune, but she creates another carrier each time she feeds, and soon there is chaos and mayhem in the streets of Montreal as martial law takes over and authorities begin gunning down infected citizens.

Chambers has an odd screen persona in this film, perhaps a directorial choice or simply due to her delivery, which is sometimes very detached and cold. If she doesn't seem quite at home being the lead in a film, it doesn't hurt by any means, and in fact it adds to the otherworldly nature of the plot. Although Cronenberg features Marilyn Chambers top

less in several scenes, she has no sex scenes, and the nudity is very clinical and desexualized. Once she is seen topless lying in a hospital bed with monitors attached to her unconscious body, and another time she strips to her bare necessities in a bathroom, but she is writhing in pain at the time. It's an interesting way to feature an actress who had previously appeared in films where the audience was encouraged to sexualize her. Even in the scenes where Rose uses her sexuality to attract victims, as a character she exudes menace more than anything else, smiling in an innocent way that's actually chilling.

The most effective part of Marilyn Chambers' performance is how good she is at communicating Rose's own bewilderment with this unwelcome change in her body. From her own viewpoint, she just woke up one day after a violent accident and her body had already been damned to crave human blood. It's fascinating how each time she attacks, she has a different level of awareness about what she is actually doing. When she feeds for the first time, it is on a patient to comes into her room when he hears her screaming. Rose embraces him and doesn't seem to be fully aware of what her new organ is doing, acting purely on instinct. Next is when she attempts to feed on a cow, eventually attacking a wino who catches her in the act and tries to rape her. Later she is forced to use her cunning in order to select and attack her "donors", although we don't usually get the impression that she wants to hurt anyone. There is one victim, however, that Rose makes a conscious choice to corner and kill, a young guest at the clinic relaxing in a hot tub. Rose assumes this persona that is both childlike and sexual, slowly advancing on the woman and getting into the hot tub without even removing her clothing. Betraying the brutal nature that Rose's hunger brings out in her, this woman's body is later discovered callously stashed in a freezer.

Her murderous instinct is portrayed in the film as a crisis for her rather than something she enjoys, as Rose keeps trying to be a normal person and to resume eating food instead of drinking blood, but she can't keep anything down, and her need for blood drives her to become manipulative and deceitful. It is a corruption brought on her unwillingly, by a doctor who is selling the idea of a perfect body to clients who are panic-stricken about the fact that their own bodies are changing and aging.

Chambers does a great job bringing the character to life, despite the fact that her part is noticeably vague; we know almost nothing about Rose, we meet her just before she has her accident, and she doesn't even have any lines in the film until she wakes up in the clinic—it's only about 12 minutes into the film, but so much has happened already. Since Rose is a cipher to us, we don't have much of a sense of loss about the destruction of her humanity. I found myself wondering where her family was, and if they were at all

concerned about the fact that she was lying in a coma for a month in a clinic in the middle of nowhere. Still, it's easy enough to see her learning about herself and her "new" body as she tries to navigate the difficult existence of seeking out human blood for nourishment.

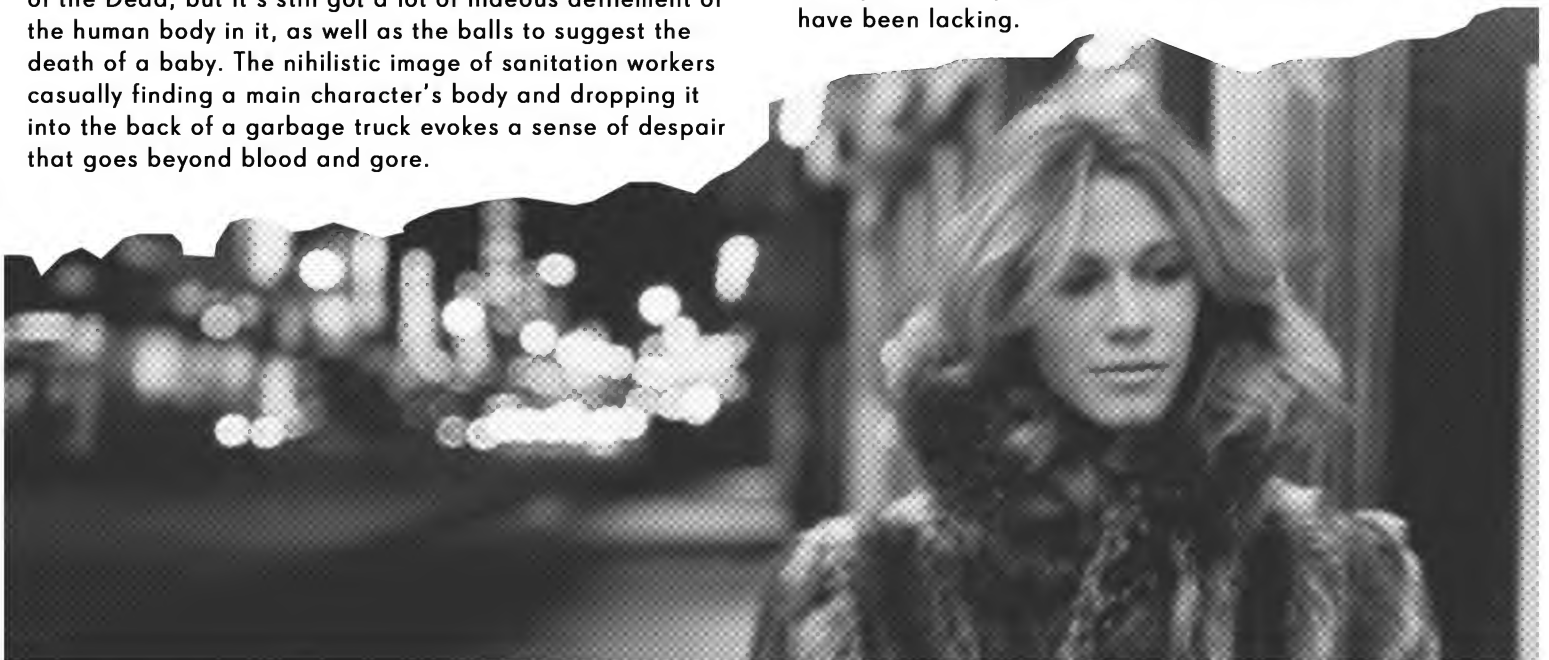
Cronenberg uses this abbreviated approach to the other characters in the film as well, which keeps *Rabid* moving along at a decent pace, and ultimately that's one of its greatest strengths. The things he does show you about his characters are revealing enough to communicate who they really are, such as when Joe Silver sits up watching TV with his infant son, or when we see Frank Moore (who plays Hart) tinkering around in his garage, working on his motorcycle.

Just as terrifying as Rose's personal odyssey is the realistic way that Cronenberg depicts the outbreak of the disease. It becomes clear that once a person is infected, death is a certainty, but not before the victim goes homicidal and dies in agony. In response to this, citizens are shot down in cold blood once signs of the disease begin to manifest themselves—in one scene, a sniper on a rooftop shoots an infected man who climbs onto Joe Silver's car, after which guardsmen in hazmat suits remove the body and spray the car with disinfectant before casually motioning for Silver to be on his way. An even more disturbing moment occurs when an infected man attacks a patron inside a shopping mall, prompting a guard to open fire; unfortunately he takes down a few innocent bystanders as well, including a department store Santa taking photos with children. It's a bizarre but effective moment, and Cronenberg seems to be pointing out that comforts such as Christmas would be casualties if civilized society breaks down. It must be said that although George Romero did, in both *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Crazies*, fine tune the idea of a contaminated mob attacking and infecting normals, *Rabid* delivers a few shockingly violent scenes in bright color, such as a moment when a rabid police officer is shot dead in a precinct by a fellow officer in gory detail. Cronenberg doesn't go as far over the top with the gore as Romero did later in *Dawn of the Dead*, but it's still got a lot of hideous defilement of the human body in it, as well as the balls to suggest the death of a baby. The nihilistic image of sanitation workers casually finding a main character's body and dropping it into the back of a garbage truck evokes a sense of despair that goes beyond blood and gore.



One of the most disturbing aspects of *Rabid* has got to be the way Rose's new freak-of-nature organ is depicted. Although it is phallic looking when it's fully extended, it emerges from an opening in her armpit that is distinctly vaginal, blurring the lines of gender just a little; Rose may be a sexually appealing woman, but her partners are unprepared for the kind of organ that she intends to use to penetrate them, and even though her ultimate goal is to consume human blood, her attacks are sexual in nature. For this kind of change to come over the body of a character played by an adult film star is a brilliant way to get under the skin of the audience by exploiting their own expectations. The fact that Rose develops this mutation after receiving tissue grafts meant to stimulate growth suggests that the human body is capable of changing in hideous ways if it's nudged in the right direction. It's this concept that has fueled some of David Cronenberg's most enduring work, and most nightmarish images.

In 2016, Scream Factory brought *Rabid* back to home video in the best representation of it that I've seen, with a great looking 2K scan that brings out the colors and composition in ways that the previous home versions I've seen have been lacking.



THE BROOD (1979) ^{by} John Leavengood

MY CALL: With all the best effects and most disturbing imagery limited to the final scene, this film remains powerful by virtue of its uneasy atmosphere, which persists throughout. I expected more in the gore department, but was impressed nonetheless. **MORE MOVIES LIKE The Brood:** I'm reminded of *Altered States* (1980), *Possession* (1981) and *The Manitou* (1978).

Canadian director and writer David Cronenberg (*The Fly*, *Rabid*, *Videodrome*) makes some serious statements about modern psychology and metaphysics in this 70s horror oddity. One-on-one sessions between Doctor Hal Raglan (Oliver Reed; *Venom*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*) and patient Nola (Samantha Eggar; *The Astronaut's Wife*, *Demonoid*, *The Uncanny*) strike me as intense to the point of perpetual creepiness. Raglan roleplays Nola's mother and daughter (among others), spelunking his way through Nola's fears, secrets and trauma. We learn that these sessions are quite frequent as Nola is undergoing therapy at Raglan's private facility.

After a weekly visit with their daughter Candice (Cindy Hinds; *The Dead Zone*), Nola's husband Frank (Art Hindle; *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Void*, *Black Christmas*) becomes alarmed after discovering scratches and bruises on their five-year old. Raglan defends Nola, who is not permitted visitation with her husband as she is at a "critical stage in her therapy," and Frank becomes ever more suspicious. Things escalate when Nola's mother (Nuala Fitzgerald; *He Never Died*), father, and Candy's teacher all turn up brutally murdered by diminutive killers.

Early encounters with "the brood" are akin to evil dwarf attacks. We witness destructive mischief and malformed creatures reaching for weapons, but we don't see the twisted little assailants. The first encounter with these monstrous little humanoids is neither scary nor gory, and is only brutal in concept (but not so in execution). Subsequent scenes unveil more blood along with our killers' deformed faces. It seems that through an unexplained treatment protocol of psychoplasms and her resulting physiological changes, Nola has physically manifested her rage in the form of her brood.

Following *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1977), *The Brood* will not hold a candle to the gore or visceral brutality of *Scanners* (1981), *Videodrome* (1983) or *The Fly* (1986)—three films which remain today much more visually pleasing than Cronenberg's earlier work. No, this film's imagery doesn't pack a punch anymore when viewed today. What it does have is atmosphere. The film's focus on Nola's therapy is off-putting yet intriguing, and it makes the final reveal all the more powerful (and still impactful, contrary to the film's death scenes).

Many times, I couldn't tell if I was being clued in or misled by the direction of Raglan's roleplaying—but these scenes always held my attention and invested me in Frank's effort to protect his daughter from a mentally unstable mother. Moreover, we find ourselves constantly questioning if Raglan is a villain or ally or ignorant bystander to the true forces at work.

With all the best effects and most disturbing imagery limited to the final scene, this film remains powerful by virtue of its uneasy atmosphere, which persists throughout. I expected more in the gore department, but was impressed nonetheless.



<https://twitter.com/MFFHorrorCorner>



SCANNERS (1981) by Jack J

Here's something you don't know. There's a concurrent world that exists right next to the world that you and I live in. It looks the same. It smells the same. Just as grotty, run down, and full of human scum as our own. However, there's one slight difference. It has scanners! Not scanners attached to your printer mind you. Nor the ones that doctors use. But real live human scanners. They live in the gutter. They barely get by. Despite their extra ability to scan and control ordinary people most of them seem to fester in back alleys and abandoned houses. They have no idea of how to control their scanner powers. One such derelict scanner is Cameron Vale. At the beginning of SCANNERS he's picked up by people from a pharmaceutical company and invited (much against his will) in for a check-up by Dr. Paul Ruth.

Doctor Ruth has studied scanners for quite some time and has an interest in helping Vale. However, he's not the only person with great knowledge into the field of scanners. At the other end of town we find Darryl Revok, a scanner himself and with powers under full control. Powers to pop your head should you step on his blue-suedes. Revok's goal is to find and control every scanner there is - and eventually take over the world. No less.

Doctor Ruth convinces Cameron Vale to try and infiltrate Revok's group. But along the way Vale runs into a group of scanners that have gone underground, and he begins to question whether he knows the truth about Dr. Ruth. And just who exactly is Darryl Revok?

THE FILM

I reckon I'm not alone on this; I divide David Cronenberg's films into three groups; his first films, his midperiod films, and his "new" films. His initial films are good but they don't quite have that very distinctive Cronenberg feel to them that his later midperiod films have. And with his newer films he has left behind the "body horror" element that he perfected with films such as THE BROOD, VIDEODROME, THE FLY, SCANNERS, etc. Cronenberg's 1980s films are all equally good but if I were to make a top 10 list of these equally good films I would certainly put SCANNERS close to the top (and yes that's a contradiction in terms if I ever saw one, so shoot me). The mood, tone and atmosphere of SCANNERS is like no film by any other director. Even if this weren't a great film (which it is) the atmosphere itself would make it great. In the weeks prior to rewatching SCANNERS for this issue of House of Skin I also rewatched the two sequels, SCANNERS 2: The New Order and SCANNERS 3: The Takeover. Neither of them come close to the feel of the original film. They're entertaining action films but that's as far as they go.

Towards the end of the film, computers play a significant role. Computers in 1981 were huge in size compared to now and programs were slow, simple, crude. Another

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SCANNERS
... Their thoughts can kill!

PIERRE DAVID - VICTOR KULICKI - DAVID CRONENBERG - SCANNERS
JENNIFER O'NEILL - STEPHEN LACK - PATRICK MCGOCHAN

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KENTUCKY
AND
DRIVE-INS
ONLY!

THE EXTERMINATOR
... the man they
pushed
too far.

ADDED:
AT
DRIVE-INS
ONLY!

If this one
doesn't
scare you...
You're Already
Dead!

PHANTASM

reviewer might have wanted to criticise this for making the film look dated. Not this reviewer, though. Almost 40 years down the line the computers in SCANNERS are so old that we are no longer used to them. Quite frankly, to me they look futuristic again or even alien. My overall verdict is SCANNERS is almost an island onto its own. It's timeless. It hasn't lost any of its atmosphere. I once read an feature article about Cronenberg and his films in a fanzine from Denmark called Inferno; The writer made the observation that Canada seemed colourless in Cronenberg's films. This particular issue was published about 25 years ago but even so I've always remembered this description. SCANNERS is indeed in colour but after having watched the film I fully agree the impression that is left on your inner screen is that of a colourless experience.

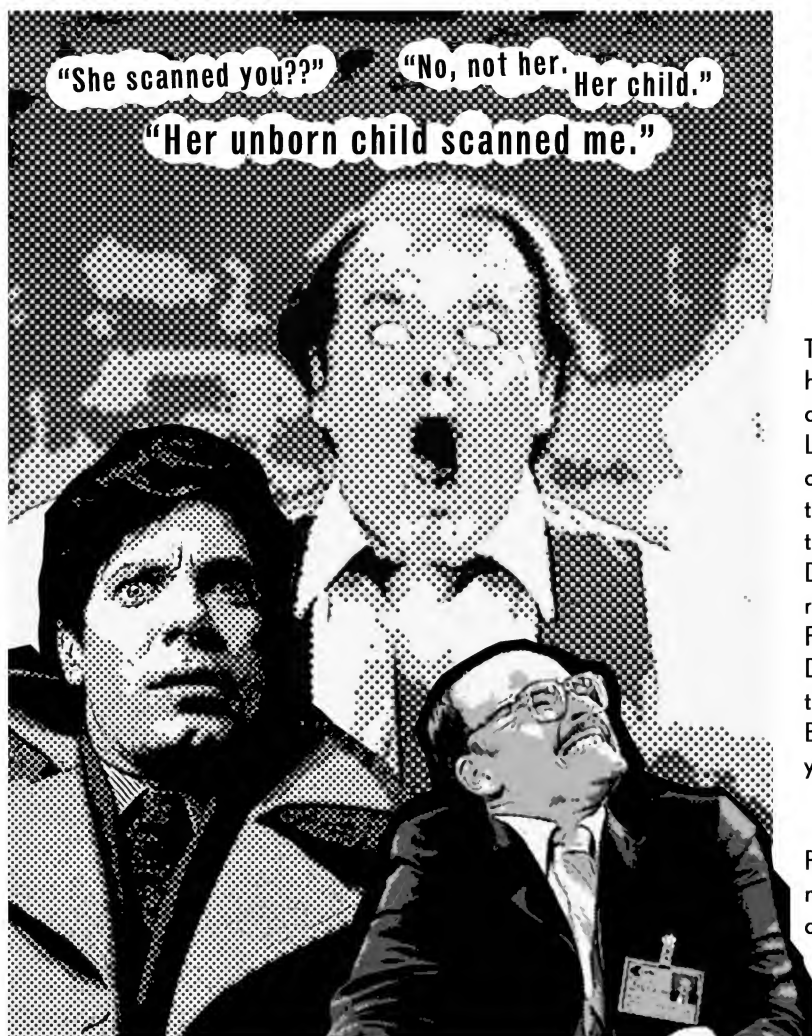
THE CAST

Needless to say, it doesn't hurt the film that it has a fantastic cast in the lead roles. Stephen Lack does a great job as Cameron Vale. He was also in Cronenberg's DEAD RINGERS (1988). In real life he's a renowned painter. And it goes without saying that Patrick McGoohan is well cast as Dr. Paul Ruth. He's been in heaps of films, of course, but the one title I'll urge you to seek out is his 1960s British cult tv series The Prisoner. It's more brilliant than most other brilliant things. Michael Ironside as a scanner gone to the dark side is basically his lifetime achievement as an actor. Or to paraphrase Martin Landau as Ed Wood; this is the one he'll be remembered for. Stalwart Cronenberg actor Robert Sil-

verman has a small but meaty role as an obscure killer of own parents turned artist that incidentally happens to be a scanner. Silverman has been in no less than five Cronenberg films and was also in the entertaining and gory (and silly) JASON X in which David Cronenberg had a cameo!

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

My first encounter with David Cronenberg came in the late 1980s via an English language punk rock fanzine called Moshable out of Scandinavia. I forget how many of Cronenberg's films they reviewed but one of them was THE BROOD (1979). I was living in jolly ol'e London at the time and I simply could not find any of Cronenberg's films on video. So I sent an oldskool letter to the editor and basically begged him to send me some of those uncut films that he and his zine wrote about. Moshable was punk pure rock but amongst reviews of your everyday punk records, punk scene reports, punk band interviews, and what have you punk-rocky, they would also review edgy cinema that didn't fit into the mainstream mould. This was in the middle of the video nasties scare mind you and heaps of stuff was simple impossible to get hold of in the UK - legit at least. I remember the first parcel that he sent me from Denmark; vhs dupes of uncut goodies like THE EVIL DEAD, LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT, TENEBRAE, HENRY PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER (off a studio master, the film wasn't even on vhs in the US at this stage). A-n-d a copy of Cronenberg's THE BROOD that looked like a 4th or 5th generation dupe!



The feel and atmos of that fuzzy THE BROOD vhs dupe hooked me right away. I had never felt anything like I did during that initial viewing. I watched it again. And again. Later, needless to say, I got hold of better (and legit) copies of the film. To this day it's still a favourite. Getting those early vhs dupes propelled yours truly into a life of a tapetrader (but that's another story for another issue of a David K zine). Suffice to say, some time later I found a rental tape of SCANNERS and kept a dupe off said tape. For this review I've watched a first generation (i.e. original) DVD release. It may very well be that music was better in the late 80s - but by no means do I miss fuzzy vhs dupes. But no matter the format, SCANNERS is top notch. I urge you to watch it.

PS: Should your heart desire more scanner action I'll recommend part 4 & 5 (aka SCANNER COP 1 & 2). They're quite a bit better than part 2 & 3 in my book.

Meet Jack J <https://www.facebook.com/jack.jensen.7965>

"INFERNO" (aka "VIOLETTA")
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 CARR, AND OTHERS)
 (CASTING BY)
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 PRODUCTION A UNIVERSAL RELEASE
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 "INFERNO" (aka "VIOLETTA")

David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) is a masterpiece of body horror, also known as venereal horror. Let's take a closer look.

Here's a synopsis of the film from the always wonderful IMDb: "A brilliant but eccentric scientist begins to transform into a giant man/fly hybrid after one of his experiments goes horribly wrong."

This IMDb synopsis isn't wrong. It just feels horribly simplified, right? There's so much more to say about *The Fly*. One could point out the romantic triangle between the "mad" scientist Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) and his newly minted lover/journalist Veronica (Geena Davis) and her ex-lover/editor Stathis Borans (John Getz). One could also point out a possible allegory of puberty, as Seth undergoes "changes" in his body, pimples, and other oozing features while becoming obsessed with his physique and sexual intercourse. Or we could go with the basic plot of an eccentric scientist and his doomed experiment. But neither of those feels quite right, do they? No. Something deeper is going on.

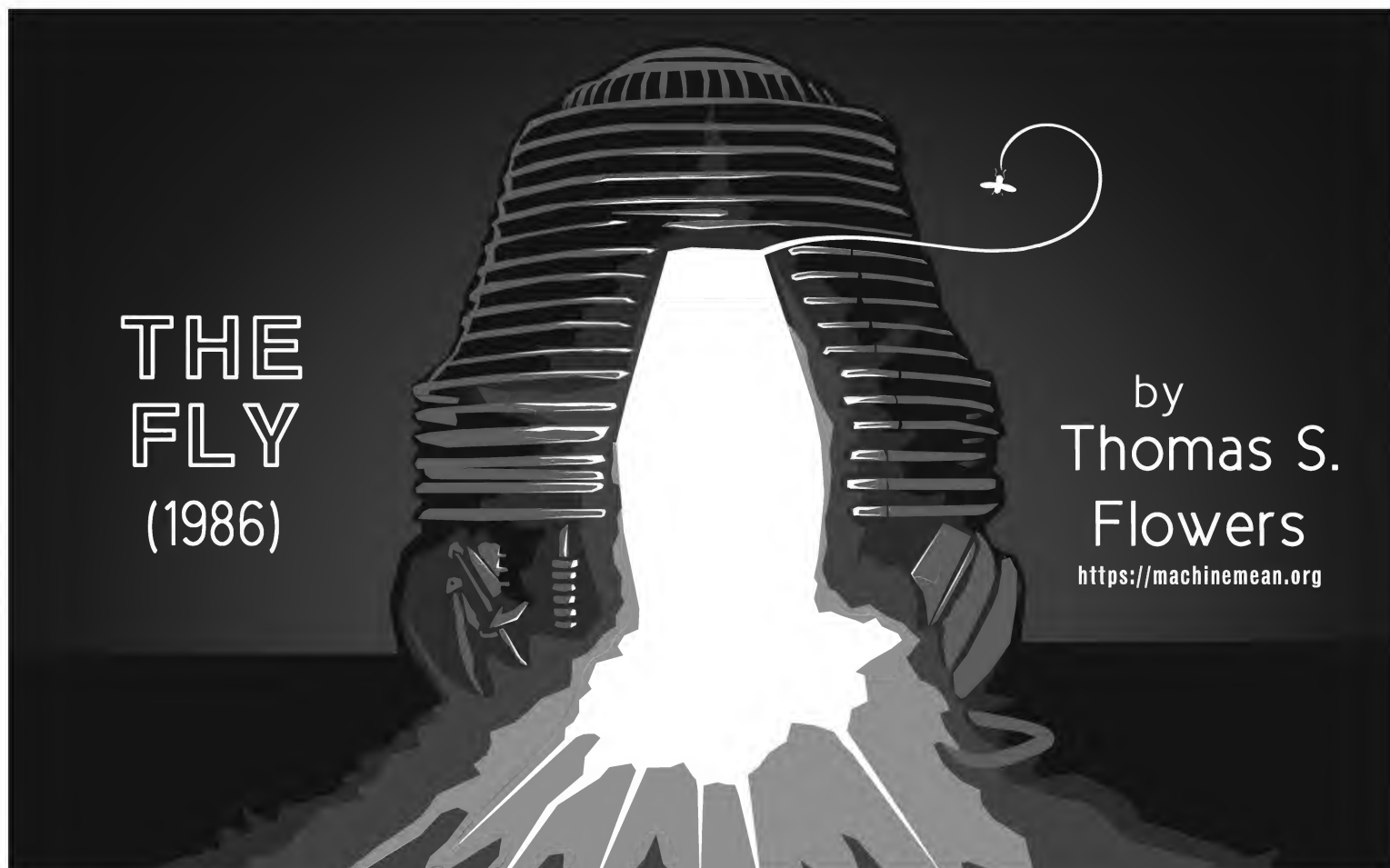
Before we consider *The Fly*, we ought to consider the director. David Cronenberg, also known as the King of Venereal Horror, back in the 80s and late 70s, set in motion a series on what film nerds refer to now as organic-horror, biological horror, or simply body horror. Anything to do with the horror of the human anatomy. For Cronenberg, we can look to *Dead Ringers*, *Videodrome*, *Scanners*, *Shivers*, *The Brood*, *eXistenZ*, and *Rabid* that could arguably be counted toward his run on body horror themed films. Each one taking on a different aspect or story regarding our humanistic fears about our

own bodies juxtaposed to our vulnerability to disease or technology or parasites. In *The Fly*, this fear seems to be centered around the fear of mind versus body. Fear of what our minds create, that is technology, doesn't feel dominate, though it definitely plays a part in Cronenberg's philosophy.

We cannot ignore it.

Seth Brundle admits during the first hour of the movie that he has extreme motion sickness and he feels that this is a crippling condition. He cannot travel very far without getting sick. So, motivated by this horror he feels handicaps him by isolating him, scientist Brundle sets out to create a teleportation device, so that he may beam from one point to another without ever getting sick. His endeavor works. He has invented and created a teleportation pod, or tele-pod. But there's a catch. The machine cannot properly read or understand flesh. This failure is clearly and disgustingly seen in the teleportation of Baboon #1 as the poor monkey is turned inside out. The machine doesn't understand flesh, just as the character Seth does not understand flesh. He works exclusively alone, isolated from even his peers until he can no longer tolerate being alone. As he says to Veronica, the reason why he sought her out in the first place was because he had been alone for too long, he desires, craves, lusts for human contact. In a way, this illustrates the drama taking place between mind and body. His mind wants to continue its intellectual pursuits, but the body demands human interaction and thus intervenes and creates obstacles in the path of his goals.

While the mind is presented as being purely objective, the body is thought of as being subjective. During the duration



of the movie, these ideas of mind and body are turned inside out, just as the Baboon was, and exposed for the ugliness this philosophy can bring upon us. Ideas become twisted. Seth creates a machine to solve his motion sickness problem. Okay, but he's alone and finds solace in journalist Veronica. His bodily craving is resolved, for now, until more fleshly desires present themselves when Veronica puts the moves on our bumbling scientist. Suddenly he understands the dilemma between mind and body due to his ignorance of body and correlates his discovery with the tele-pod machine. He then successfully transports Baboon #2. They celebrate. Unfortunately, Veronica has to, as she says, "scrape off the heel" of her shoe the problematic ex-lover/editor Borans. Unschooled in the ways of human interaction, let alone women, Seth believes his new girlfriend is cheating on him or whatever and gets drunk and decides to go through the pod himself. Abandoning mind for bodily created jealousy. Unknown to him, a fly joins him in the pod and away they go. The machine wasn't programmed to account for two separate genetic codes and so decides on its own, or more likely a fallback program, to splice them together. Seth emerges from the other pod in a cloud of white smoke seemingly unharmed or changed, instead, he is glistening and muscular, perfection one might say of both mind and body...but as horror fans, we know all too well there are no such guarantees.

Something went wrong.

It is interesting how Cronenberg differed here from the original 1958 film. When scientist Andre Delambre (played by Al Hedison) emerges from his pod he is instantly changed. His head is that of a fly's head and his once human hand is a mandible-like claw. Differing, in this 1986 adaptation, Seth Brundle emerges seemingly unchanged but then goes through a slow and grueling deformation of his flesh and eventually his mind too. At first, he denies what's happening, as any good horror character will do. When Veronica realizes something is amiss and tries to make him realize he is different, Seth screams at her, "You're afraid to dive into the plasma pool, aren't you? You're afraid to be destroyed and recreated, aren't you? I'll bet you think that you woke me up about the flesh, don't you? But you only know society's straight line about the flesh. You can't penetrate beyond society's sick, gray, fear of the flesh. Drink deep, or taste not the plasma spring! Y'see what I'm saying? And I'm not just talking about sex and penetration. I'm talking about penetration beyond the veil of the flesh! A deep penetrating dive into the plasma pool!"

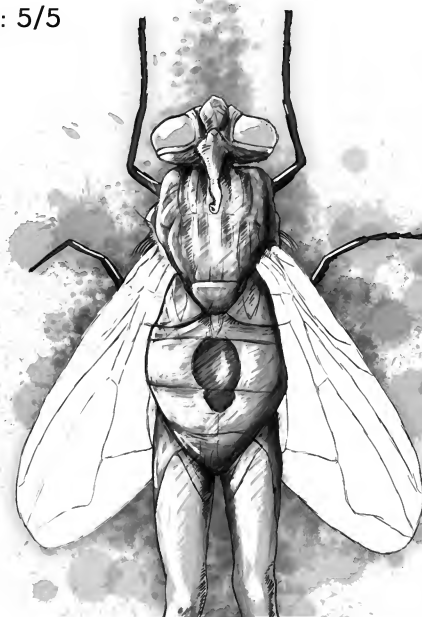
The pacing of this film is magnificent. Shortly after the above scene, Seth witnesses the first of many parts of his body that begin to fall off. Slowly, with each stage of decomposition, which quickly is realized as a perverted form of evolution, his bodily-humanity is degraded, ruined, being transformed into something else. At first, Seth accepts this new discovery, jokingly referring to his medicine cabinet as a Brundle Museum of Natural History. But the more insect he becomes, the more he realizes his once beloved intellect will also slip away into the obscurity of a brutal body-dominated fly. This realization is made in one of the movies best

lines when Seth asks Veronica is she "ever heard of insect politics? Neither have I. Insects... don't have politics. They're very... brutal. No compassion, no compromise. We can't trust the insect. I'd like to become the first... insect politician. Y'see, I'd like to, but... I'm afraid, uh... I'm saying... I'm saying I – I'm an insect who dreamt he was a man and loved it. But now the dream is over... and the insect is awake. I'm saying... I'll hurt you if you stay."

Seth quickly goes to work to try and resolve this transformation before he loses his mind to the bug. The machine analysis in an algorithm that he would have to splice two or more pure humans to reverse the insectoid growth. Devastated over Veronica's departure, Seth discovers she is pregnant and chases her down when she seeks an abortion. In a dream, Cronenberg himself plays the gynecologist, which is stoically brilliant. Seth, of course, crashes into the changing room and takes her away, imploring that she does not kill what remains of his humanity. She cannot and so he goes about his last-ditch attempt to reverse the progression of the insect with one of the best transformation effects ever conceived on screen as Brundle becomes a fully matured Brundlefly. The attempted abortion and the splicing algorithm give clues to this "other" possibility of resolving the conflict between mind and body. The mind can take action to destroy physical progression. Consider how people are outside of the movies. Why do people pursue cosmetic surgery? Why do we have organ transplants?

The Fly calls to our extremes. The war between our minds and body's. Seth ignored his body, pursuing only the mind, to end up pursuing his physical desires over the discovery his intellect had made, only to realize all too late the need for an equal relationship between both mind and body. The Fly is definitely one of my favorite 1980s horror flicks and one of my favorite Cronenberg films. Great composition. Amazing practical effects. Top notch character acting. And gratifying gross-out scenes. But not just that, The Fly also has a deeper meaning that I find equally satisfying to all the blood and guts and giant humanoid insects, what would I be without my mind? What would I be without my body?

My Rating: 5/5



NAKED LUNCH (1992)

by Rachel Flores Lara

Alright, I think this one deserves a place all by itself. There is really no other way to describe this one other than trippy. This was a first time watch for me in early 2016. Needless to say when it was over, I was trying to figure out what the hell I had just watched. There is so much going on here, it doesn't seem to make all that much sense. And just when you think everything is going to fall into place, it goes all crazy again.

So here is what I gathered from this flick:

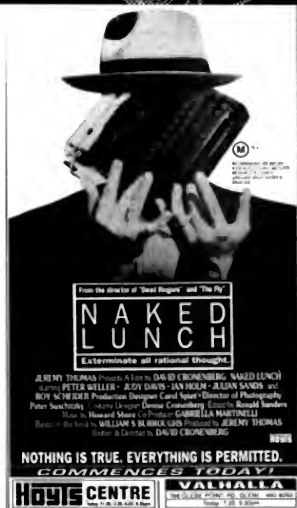
"Bug Powder" will get you high and give you crazy hallucinations. These grand hallucinations include all sorts of characters including Mugwumps and typewriters that seem to morph into nasty looking bugs. "Black Meat" is made up of ground up giant centipedes. This is then added to the bug powder so when you use it, it will become less and less desirable. You should not be high on bug powder if you are

doing the William Tell challenge with your wife.

These, of course, are just a few of the stand out points. There are many, many bizarre scenes but two are etched permanently in my brain, which is no bueno. First is a scene where Bill and Joan are getting it on, and we then see the typewriter sitting on top of the table start to transform into some hideous thing that decides to jump in and join them. Ewww. But there is one scene that just freaked me the hell out when I first saw it. This is when Bill walks into the room and sees Yves and Kiki. OMG! Sounds like they were having sex, I'm pretty sure they started out having sex, but doesn't seem to be ending that way. Yves is now a humongous centipede devouring Kiki! O....m....geeee! I've seen all sorts of weird crap in my lifetime, but for some reason this absolutely turned my stomach. Poor Kiki.

This movie is not for everyone, but has to be seen to be believed. This has also got me wanting to read the book that the movie is based on by William S. Burroughs. I would give this a 7/10 more for the bizarre imagery, which is fascinating to me.

Naked Lunch.....set your eyes on it, if you dare.



Sex, Death, and Cyborgs:

David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) By Bill Meeker

Crash (1996) is one of the more perverse movies by David Cronenberg, a director well known for his taste for the transgressive. In his previous release, *M. Butterfly* (1993), he explored a fictionalized true story that undermines traditional categories of gender (male/female) and sexuality (gay/straight) through a collaboration with David Henry Hwang to adapt for the screen the latter's play of the same name. The film demonstrates the fluidity of these pairs, both within and between them. *Crash* focuses on another dichotomy, sex and violence, in which the paired terms are conventionally seen as mutually exclusive. Cronenberg adapts J. G. Ballard's controversial novel of the same name, which tells the story of a group of people who share a fetish for car crashes.

Specifically, *Crash* shows how a chance event, a fatal automobile accident, radically transforms the open marriage of a heterosexual couple, film producer James Ballard (James Spader) and his wife Catherine (Deborah Kara Unger). Fusing the possibility of violent death in a crash and sexual desire leads to a collapse in the distinctions between "hetero" and "homo" and male and female. It also brings out the sadomasochism latent in the relationship between these two "plain vanilla" swingers. Finally, it suggests a fusion of human and machine that recalls the figure of the cyborg, a gender-bending, sexually indeterminate hybrid of biology and technology that has become a trope of 21st century sci-fi, most recently in Rupert Sanders' 2017 live-action remake of the animated feature *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, dir. Mamoru Oshii).

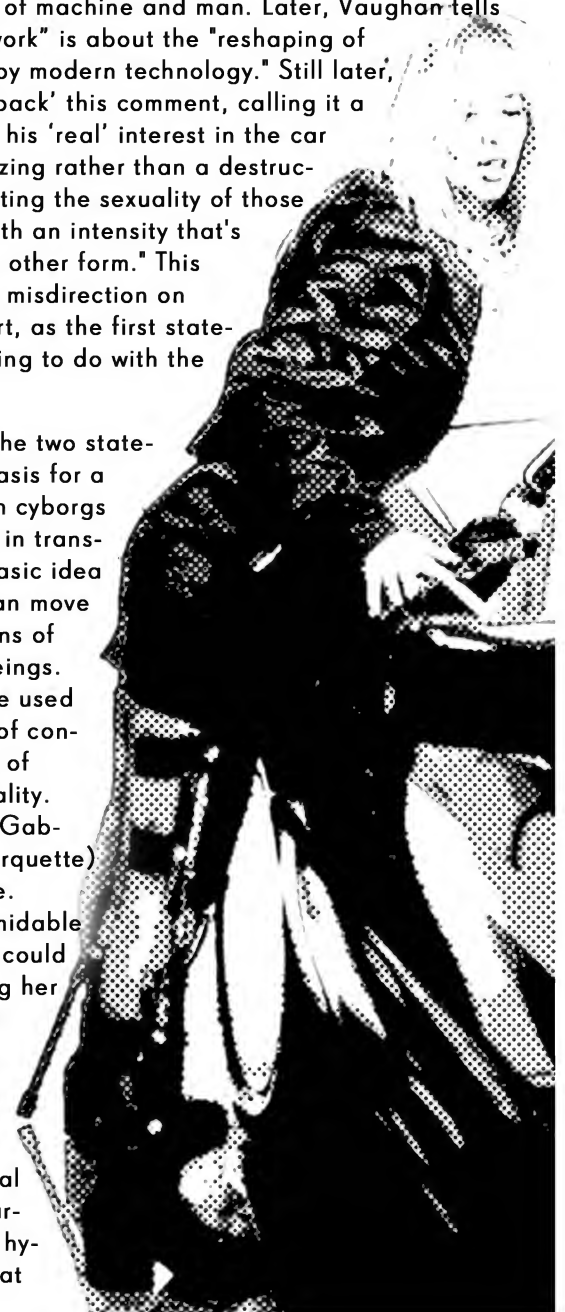
The cyborg is a theme and trope of previous Cronenberg films, including *Scanners* (1981), in which a Scanner interfaces directly with a mainframe computer, and *Videodrome* (1983), which prefigures *Crash*'s connection of human-machine hybridity with sexuality. Immediately following *Crash*, *eXistenZ* (1999) uses a video game interface to connect human minds with computer hardware. However, *Crash* is less obviously about cyborgs, especially because it foregrounds explicitly sexual content involving polymorphous perversity between and among human beings.

At the opening of *Crash*, James and Catherine appear as characters who need heterosexual encounters with others to spice up their own sexual relationship. Telling each other the details of their extramarital affairs fuels their desire for each other. In one early instance, James asks Catherine whether a tryst in an airplane hangar had brought her to orgasm. When she replies that it did not, James comments, "Maybe the next one." By the end of the film, when Catherine does not die in an auto accident that James himself causes, he delivers the same line. This equates "coming" with dying, in the process literalizing a common literary metaphor for female orgasm (*la petite mort*, the "little death" that is associated with new life).

The first incident foreshadows the second, but does so while revealing Catherine's sexual excitement at contact with the metal wing of an airplane. Even though it is a man who takes her from behind, the machine on which she leans while he does so is clearly also a factor in the eroticism of the encounter. When James has his first auto accident, sex and violent death are overtly fused: after her husband's body smashes through James' car's windshield, Helen's exposed breast eroticizes this violent death as well as the injuries that she and James sustain.

James' first contact with Vaughan (Elias Koteas) continues the cyborg theme. Vaughan is fascinated with the orthopedic hardware embedded in James' leg, which makes him a temporary hybrid of machine and man. Later, Vaughan tells James that his "work" is about the "reshaping of the human body by modern technology." Still later, he tries to 'walk back' this comment, calling it a safe PR cover for his 'real' interest in the car crash as a "fertilizing rather than a destructive event, mediating the sexuality of those who have died with an intensity that's impossible in any other form." This narrative move is misdirection on Cronenberg's part, as the first statement has everything to do with the second.

Taken together, the two statements form the basis for a particular take on cyborgs that has its roots in transhumanism. The basic idea is that cyborgs can move past the limitations of regular human beings. In *Crash*, they are used to test the limits of conventional notions of gender and sexuality. The character of Gabrielle (Rosanna Arquette) is an apt example. Although her formidable metal leg braces could be seen as coding her as disabled, they also show her as possessing a hybrid body, one that has been altered by physical trauma and its surgical repair. This hybridity is somewhat



monstrous because it involves significant scarring.

Like Vaughan's scars, Gabrielle's become erotic fixations for others with the same car crash fetish. James uses the gaping scar on the back of her leg like a vulva, which it resembles, but it is also a reconfiguration of female anatomy that is non-reproductive. This is similar to the apparent female sexual characteristics of Major Motoko Kusanagi's body in *Ghost in the Shell*. Although modeled on the human female, the Major is not traditionally female in sex, gender, and sexuality. Not as advanced a cyborg as the Major, Gabrielle's body is certainly different from the norm.

Gabrielle is also different from the norm in her bisexuality; she has sex with both James and Helen. Bisexuality appears to be the rule among the car crash fetishists of *Crash*. James also has sex with Vaughan, who also has rough sex with Catherine while James watches. All of this takes place in cars, which brings up a final aspect of the cyborg theme in *Crash*. Cronenberg's cyborgs are psychological hybrids with the automobile who try to achieve physical union with these quintessentially consumerist machines through crashing them. The ultimate form of this unity is death for the physical human body. That is a radical form of transhumanism, indeed.

Bill Meeker is at: <https://loudgreenbird.com>



The Transformative Horror of "CRASH" by Bill Van Ryn

David Cronenberg's earlier films deal with "body horror" scenarios that are fairly outlandish, like Marilyn Chambers growing a bloodsucking penis in her armpit, or Samantha Eggar giving birth to monster dwarves via an external womb triggered by her rage. Even *Videodrome* presented the idea of human bodies being horrifically reshaped as a plausible scenario, and that featured some of the most bizarre visuals Cronenberg had attempted yet.

In adapting J.G. Ballard's 1973 novel *Crash* for the screen, Cronenberg explores a different kind of metamorphosis, one that now combines the modification of the human body with the reshaping of human sexuality. The plot documents the unexpected transformation of John Ballard (James Spader) after he experiences a violent car accident. Already some-

what beyond conventional norms, Ballard is involved in an open marriage, and the sex life he shares with his wife, Catherine (Deborah Kara Unger), is fueled by the revelations that each of them make regarding their extramarital affairs. One night, Ballard experiences a head-on collision with a car in which Dr. Helen Remington (Holly Hunter) is a passenger. The driver, her husband, is violently killed when his body is thrown through the windshield. During his recovery, Ballard begins an affair with Remington that leads both of them to Vaughn (Elias Koteas), a man obsessed with what he calls the "reshaping of the human body by modern technology." Vaughn has a group of followers who stage reenactments of famous car crashes, such as the one that killed James Dean. Ballard and Catherine become drawn into Vaughn's inner circle of fetishists, with various sexual couplings occurring, usually directly involved with vehicles.

The sex scenes are fairly explicit, especially the ones between Spader and Unger, but there appears to have been a deliberate choice to drain the film of any actual eroticism. Even with the bizarre subject matter, the onscreen passion usually appears cold, but that falls in line with the tone Cronenberg has set from the beginning of his career—he isn't showing us sex for the sake of titillation, he's demonstrating how this intimate part of his characters has been altered, just like the altered bodies that his horror movie characters possessed.

You can find Bill Van Ryn at
<https://www.facebook.com/GroovyDoom>

In Madness You Dwell

By Rathan Krueger

<https://twitter.com/DarknessOpera>

It began with a friend and VIOLENCE. Or rather, his girlfriend and her parents. A criminally domestic occasion for the start of such a sanguined affair, in hindsight. The five of us sat in a living room watching A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE on the television. A device I would have intimate interactions with in many ways thanks to this night. I knew of David Cronenberg before then. As a lover of horror cinema, how could I not? He was the neighbor everyone warned you of. "Old Man Cronenberg will blow your mind!" I caught bits and pieces of THE FLY on cable or on late-night TV (heavily edited for my protection, of course). But bits and pieces are just scattered flesh without bones to hang them on to admire the artistry. As I watched my first Cronenberg film end to end, the irony wasn't lost on me that it was the murky pool of drama instead of horror that I stepped my toes in. The murkiness infected me, just the same, and as the families onscreen and surrounding me sat in silence at the end of the film, I welcomed this new disease.

My benign "friend" opened a dangerous, enticing world to me by way of an IMDb listing. Where to begin, though? Backwards from where I started? From his earliest work to where I stood? The choice would be made for me through ebay: what I could afford at the time and whichever got to my house first. I knew I wanted THE FLY to be last. Out of all the others, it was the one I knew the most about. I saw no sense in flocking towards the familiar when there was so much more unknown that the disease craved. And the disease did crave. It was benign only as long as I kept it fed. RABID and the anomalous FAST COMPANY were the first meals. Thanks to Borders and a coupon, Criterion's release of VIDEODROME wasn't too far behind.

Most people have forgotten, thanks to George Romero's re-imagining, that vampires created zombies. Though they were known better as "ghouls". A vampire bite didn't guarantee you their dark gift, as Anne Rice called it. Sometimes, it just made the victim a mindless minion. A ghoul. A zombie. RABID worked on many philosophical and socio-political levels but for me during my first watch, the bloodthirsty woman who made rage beasts from those she fed on sent flashes of vampiric lore through my mind. I embraced the epilepsy and the disease was sated. Like many or all Cronenberg fans, I was dumbfounded when I found out about FAST COMPANY. Moreso after watching it. Listening to the commentary and finding out that A) Cronenberg was a gearhead, and B) he was a journeyman director until THE BROOD, everything made sense. Well... enough sense. The disease was confused, but it was sated. My televisual intimacy fittingly reached a fever pitch with VIDEODROME. My mind made out with the screen just as Max Renn did. As you did. I must confess, the vaginal maw that accepted guns as well as Betamax cassettes caught me off-guard. I still wonder what women think about that, but I've yet to meet one open-minded enough to answer me with a straight face. If they answer at all. "Vaginal maw" tends to be a great conversation-ender. Cronenberg fans are lonesome fans, it seems. At least we share the same infection. Trouble lurked with mine, however. I hailed the new flesh but like an insatiable lover, the disease now wanted more and gave me a rash as a reminder.

art by
Demeter Lorant



Extending my search to secondhand stores, I found a few more cinematic remedies. In a documentary of the Criterion release, Samantha Eggar had this to say about *THE BROOD*: "This idea of a swelling on the outside of the body actually becoming a human being through anger, being born out of anger and forming an army. Quite a good idea, actually, come to think of it." It would be some time before I could hear her say those things but if you permit me a little temporal leeway, I completely agreed when I saw *THE BROOD*. As her character licked clean the newborn soldier of rage she ripped from a tumorous sac, I knew that wherever Cronenberg went, so too would my kingdom. The *Barron of Blood*'s banner next led me three times to things ironically much more psychological. There was a recent development to update the design of the speculum since when it was invented over 150 years ago, comfort wasn't the first thing in mind (as any woman could tell you). Keep in mind, chain-saws were also invented to help with childbirth, so comfort seemed to be far from any doctor's mind during that period. The twin gynecologists of *DEAD RINGERS* had increasingly disturbing ideas of comforting their patients, from sleeping with them to the... museum pieces one of the Mantles created to use on them. I could talk for hours about what the ending meant to me, so I'll just leave an open invite to any carriers of the Cronenberg disease who finds me in a bar. The banner next brought me to a place of irony. Cronenberg will have *THE FLY* seared onto his epitaph, so I found it amusing in a punny sort of way that I saw *SPIDER* first. I enjoyed it for more than ironic reasons, mind. How he handled mental instability and using the same performers in different roles for story reasons instead of their vanity made it a shame that the film's more of a footnote in his filmography than it should be. *EASTERN PROMISES* had just come out on Blu-ray when I became infected, so I managed to watch it, freshly bought, in the basement of a friend's house. Not the same one whose extended family of sorts introduced me to *VIOLENCE*; he was practically Ludovico'd into watching it, squirming the most during the 69. This was a friend who had filmmaking aspirations as well as my disease, so it was more of a treat than anything else. This did not satiate my strain, sadly. The rash had begun to pustule and soon, the mounds ruptured while spewing its disgust at me. From the broken skin, black ribbons erupted. Streaked with glitching, screaming images that defied the format they lurked, I was guided to more entries.

Out of desperation, I grabbed as many of the remaining films as I could to stave off whatever I was being forced to turn into. To the chagrin of many, I reached a lull with *SCANNERS* and *DEAD ZONE*. Telekinesis was never something I was interested in, and neither was predicting the

future. Perhaps I should've paid more attention to the latter, however, to be more prepared as I currently live through President Stillson's tyranny. In any case and despite my misgivings, the disease was sated. Then I watched what would become a stream of most of my favorites from Cronenberg. *M. BUTTERFLY* was a film that I'm convinced would've been more loved if it was made post-*VIOLENCE*. Since it was made during the time when people still expected pain of an intense and bloody nature from Cronenberg, it was discarded almost as soon as it was released. Also, now as opposed to then, we are more accepting of the transgendered tale that was told. One of my favorite stories of Cronenberg is how he met William S. Burroughs and was disappointed because despite all the bug imagery in his books, there was only one entomologist in that conversation. It didn't stop him from adapting *NAKED LUNCH*, and there were no sour grapes because he adapted it magnificently. The year 1999 was dominated by *THE MATRIX*, but there was another film about blurring the lines twixt reality and the virtual. *EXISTENZ* handled the concept more profoundly because it didn't have tens of millions of dollars hanging over it. As uncompromising as *THE MATRIX* is, compromises were still made. For instance, the character Switch was supposed to be a woman in one world and a man in another. The Wachowskis met Warner halfway and Switch became an androgynous woman. Watching *EXISTENZ*, there's the feeling that Cronenberg was unchained. As time goes on, I hope more can appreciate that. Speaking of being unchained, that feeling was very prevalent in *THE FLY*. Like I need to tell any of you that. I don't need to tell anyone anything about it because so much has been said over the decades. And with Emma Westwood's anniversary book full of interviews lurking about, I would be rattling off even more redundancies. While on the subject of books, I also had the pleasure of re-reading Faber and Faber's *CRONENBERG ON CRONENBERG* and Serge Grünberg's interview book. Eagle-eyed fans might notice that I left out a film between *RABID* and *EASTERN PROMISES*. They'll also notice that I didn't mention *SHIVERS* or any of his art films. With regard to the latter, they were incredibly hard to track down at the time. The film in question was avoided because I wanted to save the best for last. I believe that saying something is "the best" is really just arrogant favoritism. I am a humble man, but I figure I've earned an occasional allowance of ego. *CRASH* is the ultimate Cronenberg film, to me. Many would cry "Heresy!" because it's not a horror film, but his filmography jumps all over the place. Just look at all the titles up there in bold. There's bloodletting, sure, but there's also drama. And with all the great body horror he's presented us, I can't think of anything more horrific than a man fucking a woman's leg wound. Brundlegly melted Stathis' ankle, but he didn't have sex with it afterwards. Revok blew up that guy's head, but he didn't hump the neck stump. That's not to say I'm a prude. I think sex is fantastic, but there's something wonderfully horrific about mixing sex and violence in a disturbing and intelligent way (like fucking a leg wound). Find out more with me, the bar, and *DEAD RINGERS*' ending. And isn't that what Cronenberg's mad filmography represents: disturbing intelligence? *CRASH* keeps the disease at bay, which is good enough for me.



SPIDER (2002)

By Chris Genro

When The Fiend asked me to contribute to his latest project concerning the films of David Cronenberg, I knew I had to be a part of it. Not only for the fact that he is a fellow Canadian but because I have such respect for him as a filmmaker. While I am not familiar with his entire filmography as there are a few I have yet to track down, what I have seen has made a large impact. When people say that horror is all about blood and boobs he is an example I point to counter this. Even within the horror community there are fans that miss the early days and want him to go back to his body horror roots. What they don't realize is the themes of his films have continued even if how they are presented is different. This is the case with the film I've chosen to write about.

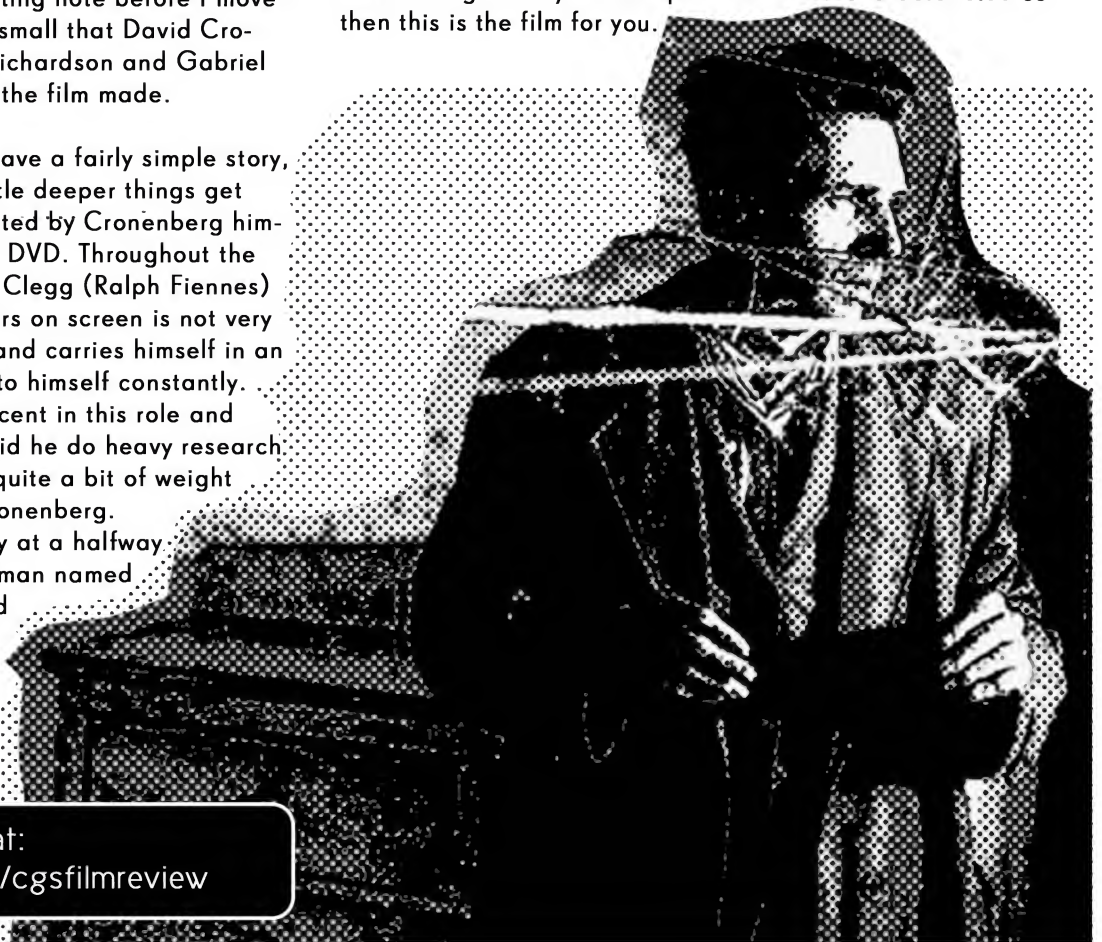
When people think of Cronenberg they always talk about *The Fly*, *The Dead Zone*, *The Brood*, etc which are all amazing films but for me the first film that popped into my head was *SPIDER* a film from 2002. The film was adapted for the screen by novelist Patrick McGrath based on his novel of the same name. While I have not read the novel, I had read from many sources that the film is obviously a faithful adaptation of the book obviously thanks to author being involved. Regardless of this, my viewing experience of a film is never clouded by other media as my review is about the film I'm viewing and that's it. An interesting note before I move forward is the film's budget was so small that David Cronenberg, Ralph Fiennes, Miranda Richardson and Gabriel Byrne deferred their salaries to get the film made.

On the surface, this film seems to have a fairly simple story, but as soon as you start to dig a little deeper things get much more complex. This is also stated by Cronenberg himself in his audio commentary on the DVD. Throughout the film we follow a man named Daniel Clegg (Ralph Fiennes) who we notice as soon as he appears on screen is not very "normal". He is dishevelled, walks and carries himself in an awkward way, and mumbles things to himself constantly. Ralph Fiennes is absolutely magnificent in this role and really commits himself as not only did he do heavy research on various conditions but also lost quite a bit of weight for the role much to the worry of Cronenberg. Daniel has arrived in London to stay at a halfway house and is run by a very strict woman named Mrs. Wilkinson (Lynn Redgrave) and has multiple other residents who are mainly kept in the background expect for one named Terrence (John Neville).

Daniel starts to flashback to multiple scenes in his life specifically from his childhood but also at times when he was in an institution. We learn that he had a very close relationship with his mother (Miranda Richardson) and his father (Gabriel Byrne) is strict with him and likes to stay out late at the local bar. What's interesting about the flashbacks with his family is the adult version of Daniel is present always lurking in the background as these scenes play out. What viewers will also notice is we flashback to scenes where he would have had no idea what transpired which starts us questioning the validity of what we are seeing. As we progress through the film we see scenes play out that lead to his father eventually murdering his wife and replacing her with a local woman he has met at the bar.

I could continue on as there are so many interesting themes her such as memories, identity, sexual awakening, and isolation but I wanted to keep things focused. I do want to say that the viewer should constantly be questioning what we are seeing. What I loved is Cronenberg states many times in his commentary they specifically avoided naming Daniel's condition as this film is more about connecting with our main character and not seeing him as damaged or different. Also, he was not going for a medically accurate representation of any one condition but trying to visually show what is going on in Daniel's mind. This film is not a passive experience as the film commands your attention at all times or you will miss something that could lead you to unlocking its secrets.

My ultimate goal here is to compel you to seek out and watch this forgotten gem as unfortunately *Spider* was released in a small number of theatres and quickly thrown away never to be heard of again. If you love quiet slow burn character studies then this is the film for you.



Read more of Chris's work at:
<https://www.facebook.com/cgsfilmreview>

Raw Passions – an article about A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

by Philip C. Perron

Discussing David Cronenberg, most think of body horror. With many of his early works, such as *SHIVERS*, *RABID*, and even *CRASH* and *THE FLY*, it's not surprising why. But he's a lot more than that. His adaption of Stephen King's *THE DEAD ZONE* is a curiosity in his early filmography since the movie, even if a horror film, showed he was a director that could branch out and encompass the literary storytelling that can appear in otherwise pulpy media. Drama and the human condition are all there in the celluloid that he makes, and when stripped of their more extreme elements, his films are strong examples of the struggle of characters and their fight to reach the ultimate goal of all of us: the pursuit of happiness. For this writer, my introduction to his movies were with these more literary works.

Hard to believe that *A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE* was a film released in 2005. At the time, graphic novels were gaining steam as a legitimate if alternate source for reading or television. But as *THE WALKING DEAD* began its second year of existence, the "cartoon" was now ready for a more mature audience. Comics weren't just about superheroes anymore.

The graphic novel, *A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE*, had been published by an imprint of DC Comics back in 1997, but it came and went with little notice. So it seems to be an unlikely source for a film adaption. And though screenwriter Josh Olson put together an award winning script, David Cronenberg stated, as with most everyone else, he was unfamiliar with the source material. That meant his film was based specifically off of what was in the screenplay. And what a screenplay it is.

Though the movie and story are twelve and twenty years old respectively, I shall still try my best to speak of it with little to no spoilers. Its synopsis goes as follows: Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen), his wife Edie (Maria Bello), and their two children, Jack and Sarah, live quietly in the small farming town of Millbrook, Indiana. Tom runs the local diner while Edie is an attorney in town. When a couple of on-the-run bad men show up to rob their greasy spoon, violence erupts leaving Tom wounded, the criminals dead, and the press all around to cover the remarkable heroics of this quiet, unassuming man. But soon Tom's actions of stopping a robbery and saving his employees from rape and death bring some unwanted attention besides the press. A high level Irish-American mobster from the East Coast arrives along with two of his goons. The leader, Carl Fogarty (Ed Harris), shows great interest in him. He claims that he believes Tom is someone named Joey Cusack, a former member of their criminal organization that may be wanted dead by the mob.

If the horror removed from a Cronenberg film leaves a dark drama about the human condition, boiling away the human condition in *A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE* leaves something even more feral about humanity: violence, rage, lust, and tribalism.

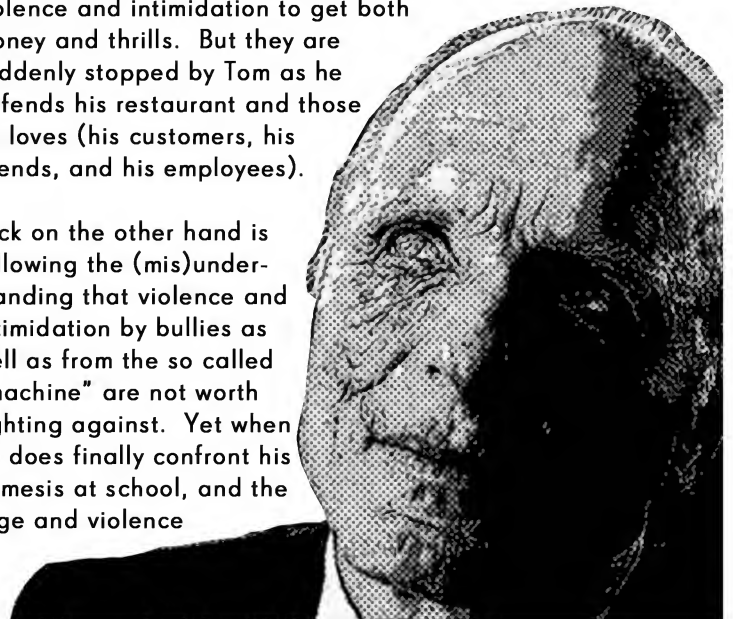
The son, Jack Stall (Ashton Holmes), shows the most interesting shift of characterization. He is the typical example of the high school student that encompasses ennui. Many folks believe that "you make with what you got", but Jack is the definition of melancholy. Millbrook, to him, is a dead end place. High school is just a consignment where he sees, just maybe a little too clearly, the cliques and injustices that will eventually follow him to adulthood. For him, hope is gone and has been replaced with a static dread.

One of the most curious scenes of the film is a juxtaposition of Jack with that of the two robbers. On a Friday night when the high school students are hanging about town, Jack tells his "maybe" girlfriend as they are smoking marijuana (something to do to escape reality?) that life will result in nothing more than marriage, a couple of kids, divorce, and financial struggle. Basically, he implies what they feel now will be as good as it gets. His girlfriend responds that his attitude has indeed made her heartbroken, not about their relationship, but about life itself. (Though could some of her sadness be her understanding that any hopes and dreams she had with Jack are moot? It is a curious question since her ennui may not be as severe as her companion's.)

The two robbers drive by at that very moment. The younger thug complains to the other about Millbrook being a Podunk town and that they are running low on funds. But the older (and alpha) of the two digs deeper into humanity's uncultivated thought process by saying that things are going to change, referring to not just finding money but more importantly the "thrill" or feral excitement of how they will go about getting it.

The alignment of the two story arcs can be interpreted as intentionally concurrent as both can be called the "calm before the storm." For the robbers, they are sociopaths through and through, where people are inconsequential to them. When they are confronted with ordinary individuals, they use violence and intimidation to get both money and thrills. But they are suddenly stopped by Tom as he defends his restaurant and those he loves (his customers, his friends, and his employees).

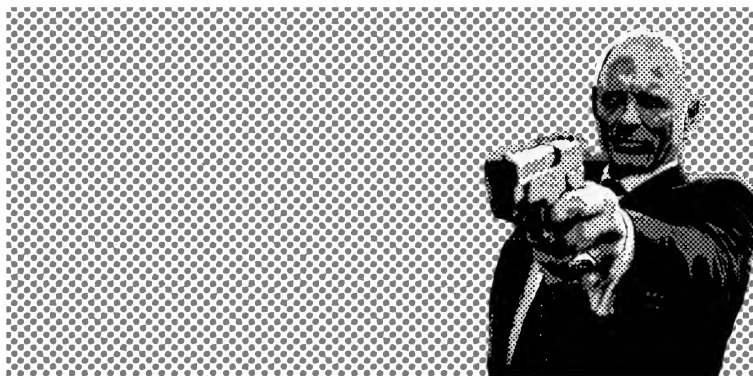
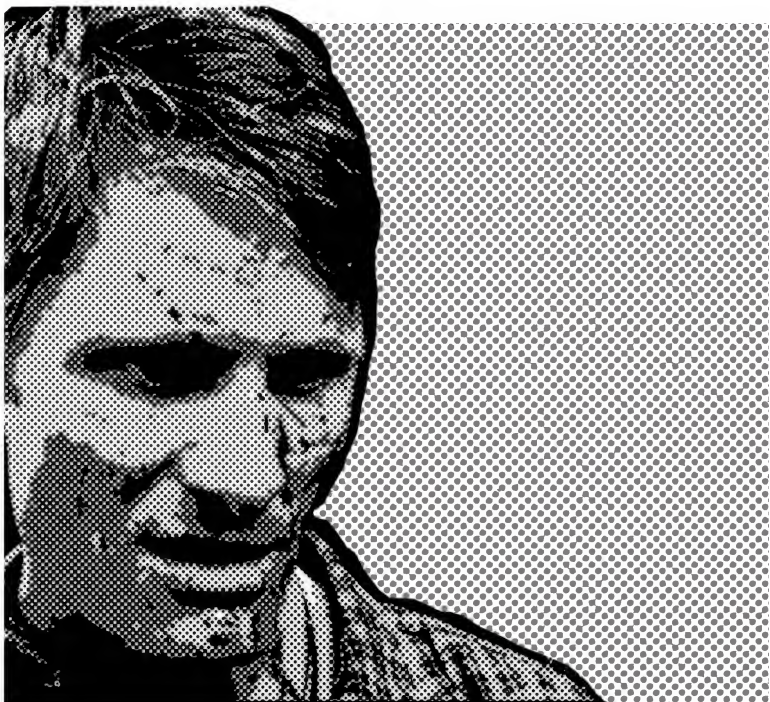
Jack on the other hand is following the (mis)understanding that violence and intimidation by bullies as well as from the so called "machine" are not worth fighting against. Yet when he does finally confront his nemesis at school, and the rage and violence



spill out of what otherwise was a quiet young man, he is pleased and in some ways gratified with his perceived justice. And to have a father who fought back against the representation of what's wrong with the world, robbers and rapists, Jack turns to idolization of his father, only to be brought to disappointment when the man punishes him for his own violent actions. Being reprimanded for fighting worldly unfairness only disheartens Jack further, leaving him once more with nothing but raw emotions such as rage, anger, confusion, and hopelessness.

Tom, on the other hand, becomes a local hero even if he desires not to be. Having single handedly vanquished violent thugs brings him attention otherwise unwanted. Quite often he states that what he did would be nothing different than the next person. However the results were so remarkably heroic and also violent, there would be no way to avoid the fact that his valiance would be anything but a tabloid news story. Unfortunately, this new fame brings with it organized crime figures coming to visit, believing he may be someone else.

As idyllic life for Tom and Edie begins to crumble with the arrival of the Irish-American mob on the literal doorstep of their diner and house, what was a passionate love life prior for this happy couple turns into an untamed mating brawl. Earlier in the film, Edie cosplays as a cheerleader and the two make love in an endearing, very personal, and therefore innocent way. Later as the family dynamic begins to break apart from the unwanted stress caused by the bad men, the two have sex like cavemen; very violently. Tom tries to use their prior passions to recover what was lost, yet Edie, who at first fights him off, surprises herself when she becomes feral and overly aroused by this new danger that may surround her man. What otherwise would appear to be an ordinarily boring couple to any outsider is actually more a relationship that includes audacious conduct by a libertine, specifically Edie. Once again, bare uninhibited emotions overpower pragmatism within the movie, as if primitive behavior persistently betrays civility.



The film and its screenplay seems to ask the simple question whether humanity is just a violent and uncultivated race. As almost all entertainment continues to relish within conflict to amuse us, one can wonder if rage, lust, violence, and passion is all that holds our attention. Eminem still sings about the glorification of violence, box offices are broken by well received violent films such as Wonder Woman, Guardians of the Galaxy 2, and Star Wars, famous folk are found to be sexual predators, and video games keep growing the virtual body counts. One may wonder, can enjoyment come from anything else?

Whether A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE is saying otherwise may be betrayed by its title. Society baths in violence, intimidation, and other bare passions. And yet the film ends with a dinner table scene. What's left of the Stall family sits quietly without speaking. From youngest to oldest, the ambiguity of what each feels is expressed upon their faces and presented by their actions. Sarah, the youngest and most innocent, shows no ambiguity at all. Her feelings are worn upon her sleeve. She only has love for those around her and has not been broken by the "machine". Jack, having experienced some awful things as the movie progresses, may in turn come around to embracing hope for both his family and his own future. For Tom and Edie, the viewer is unclear about their ultimate thoughts. Are they willing to move forward again? Has their outlook changed forever? Will they still be in love or just be pragmatic and remain together for the kids? Will they fight the good fight against the "world?" Can they overcome undomesticated instinct and go back to a nonviolent existence?

As a movie, A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE is probably best viewed at least three times. The first is to watch it as the fantastic thriller that it is. The second viewing should be to watch it as a character study. But the third viewing should be to decipher the film based off its title. Not much unlike all of Cronenberg's films, there is a subtext that is concealed within the narrative. But for A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE, the film's title at least points you in the right direction. It can be said humanity is really, really trying to remain civilized. And that is probably true. The film seems to say we are feral beasts, that we struggle each and everyday to fight our instincts, and that battle may continue forever since we are flawed. But one thing that the movie seems to conclude is that individually we might be able to survive that struggle with our nature if we stop it from consuming us.

Find Philip at: www.darkdiscussions.com

MAPS TO THE STARS (2014)

Maps to the Stars is the anti-La La Land.

La La Land was interested in the self-aggrandizing, mythological clichés associated with Hollywood and reproducing them in the most conventional manner possible. It was all surface: a load of feel-good horseshit that didn't earn its feel-good vibes.

Maps to the Stars is about surface, sure - but to say a movie about Hollywood is all about surface is as redundant as saying it's also a manifestation of everything grotesque and horrible lurking beneath said surface.

Fire-scarred Agatha Weiss (Mia Wasikowska) arrives in Hollywood from Jupiter (Florida), and finds fast employment as a PA to washed-up starlet Havana Sagrand (Julianne Moore), who is not only haunted by visions of her deceased mother, Clarice Taggart (Sarah Gadon), but is actively pursuing a role in the remake of her mother's most well-known film. Meanwhile, Stafford and Cristina Weiss (John Cusack and Olivia Williams) attempt to raise their troubled actor son, Benjie (Evan Bird) - who's fresh out of rehab. Meanwhile, put-upon limo driver Jerome (Robert Pattinson) attempts to make a name for himself as a screenwriter and actor.

Bruce Wagner's script has women refer to their "holes" more than once, and it's a none-too-subtle metaphor for the emptiness of the star system and the people assimilated into it, to the point where dissociation from reality demands they be "filled" in any way possible (if not spiritually, then a physical fuck will do).

Metaphors of infection and disease are the through-line where Maps aligns itself with Cronenberg's previous work. The film presents these Hollywood players as paradoxes: victims of circumstance and architects of their own downfall. Agatha - brought out West by a fateful Twitter connection with Carrie Fisher - is the catalyst that brings skeletons tumbling out of the family closet. Havana, meanwhile, bitches and moans and attempts to fuck her way into the much-coveted role. Early on, the specter of Clarice gives her a verbal thrashing, calling her "pathetic" for wanting to "be" her.

City of Scars by Jonny Numb

Hollywood narcissism is examined in queasy, darkly comedic ways: Clarice becomes a mocking echo chamber to Havana's insecurities - a psychological worm that refuses to stop squirming. Cristina, after receiving the news of a horrible deed Benjie's done, only breaks down once it's revealed that her son, despite his superstardom, is the one getting bumped from a production. These characters are shallow and despicable, but granted inner lives that render their blasé attitudes with notes of tragedy - with the exception of Jerome, everyone has succumbed to a destructive, life-changing event by film's end.

Repetition is key to Maps, and while there is a certain sadistic necessity to Wagner's usage of it, it renders the film a bit distended. 20 minutes could have been lopped off, and produced a more compelling and concise experience. As the film is limited mostly to behind-the-scenes encounters (outside of fleeting moments that take place "on set,"), its below-the-surface vision of Hollywood requires a particular temperament. I've read two books by Wagner (The Empty Chair and The Chrysanthemum Palace), and his writing style does capture the humanity of his fictional subjects, vapid as they may be. I would say more so than Bret Easton Ellis, whose Glamorama name-dropped celebrities as space-filler in a novel about the incestuous link between the tyranny of Hollywood's idealized notions of "perfection" and the tyranny that accompanies the extremist mentalities of terrorists.

Wagner's vision of Tinseltown is one that posits a perpetual "incest drama" grounded in Greek Tragedy - as a narrative framework, this is hardly inspired, but his handling of character is.

As brother and sister, Agatha and Benjie carry a troubled bond rooted in a personal history echoing that of their parents (who, as it turns out, were estranged siblings themselves). The generational conflict in Maps is bizarre - especially with Stafford's



reputation as a Scientology-styled therapist and philosopher (his "sessions" with Havana are, in some ways, a callback to Dr. Hal Raglan's "Psychoplasemics" in *The Brood*). His televised show has him referring to an individual "hanging under the Sword of Damocles we call AIDS," which sneaks in another venereal reference while underlining Hollywood as a disease-stricken husk running down the clock to its own extinction.

Even Cammie (Kiara Glasco, from *The Devil's Candy*), a Make-a-Wish Kid dying of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, is misidentified by Benjie as being afflicted with AIDS. After she dies, she goes on to haunt Benjie – not unlike Clarice with Havana – with a literal map tattooed onto her phantom flesh.

The brokenness of these characters is informed by a contained, exclusive world with no guidebook for "normality." Benjie speaks industry lingo, dominates boardroom meetings about his career trajectory, confesses his problems to a shrink (including Agatha's desire to "marry" him when

much, too soon; yet is also ingratiating and shallowly charismatic within his own social circle. At the end, when he confides to Agatha that he's "lost," it serves as an apt summary for every character.

In terms of aesthetic, *Maps* is a bit of puzzle: if you didn't know it was a Cronenberg movie in advance, you could very well mistake it for another director's work. Following 1988's *Dead Ringers*, the Toronto-based filmmaker ventured out of the strict horror/sci-fi ghetto and expanded his dramatic reach, but even films like *Crash* and *Eastern Promises* reflect his visceral and psychological interests. While *Maps* depicts Hollywood as a deceptively bright place, there is an element of the nondescript to the shooting style (though Peter Suschitzky's cinematography is tops, as always). This is a less action-oriented film than some of Cronenberg's other work, so the compositions have a minimalism that tends to contradict the brash overkill of other film-industry send-ups. As a result, though, *Maps* lacks a strong visual component that could have strengthened the story. While it may not contain the creatively grotesque innovations of his



they were younger), and seems to have a death wish hardwired into his personality. Cristina, the hysterical Ying to Stafford's stoic Yang, seems petrified with fear at the prospect of laying her emotions bare, to the point where her late-occurring breakdown is utterly horrific.

Cronenberg extends a bizarre empathy toward some of the characters – Agatha and Benjie in particular. Their relationship is the film's core, and while neither is innocent, their interplay is marked by confusion and desire. Waskowska hits the self-conscious beats of her disfigured character perfectly, and her concealing attire (including black gloves out of a '70s giallo) serves as a multifaceted reflection of shame and diminished self-worth. It's telling that Bird is the standout – as the world revolves around Benjie, it makes sense that his immature ego is given full clearance to wreak havoc. Previously seen in Jennifer Lynch's *Chained*, there is a tricky mix of artificiality and authenticity to Bird's portrayal of a child deprived of a conventional upbringing, showing the dichotomy of someone who knows too

earlier, more anarchic works, Cronenberg finds ways to push boundaries (including a three-way sex scene that is coldly mercenary in its intent) and extend his reach into uncharted territory. Per the John Waters blurb on the Blu-ray cover, *Maps* confronts absurd notions and painful revelations with unblinking honesty, to the point where all the histrionics and damaged psyches bring down the house in a gale of laughter.

Jonny Numb's Rating:

3.5 Meaningless Celebrity Awards out of 5

Jonny Numb can be
found on Twitter:
<https://twitter.com/JonnyNumb>



BODY & SOUL:

The Transformation of Cronenberg's Horror by Dr. Jose/Camera Viscera

When David Cronenberg burst onto the horror scene in 1975 with his first film, *Shivers* – a film wherein a leech-like sexually transmitted disease is spread throughout an ultra-modern apartment complex, turning all of its hosts into frenzied killers whose only motivations then become to circulate the disease even further – audiences were shocked. Sure, they'd seen the blood and sex before in the drive-in exploitation flicks that had preceded *Shivers*. They'd even seen similar slimy little monsters in the '50s atomic horror they grew up watching. But never before had they seen all those things combined and presented so smartly as a twisted analogy for the self-destruction of modern man. The audience wasn't ready for it; it made them uneasy – it made them take notice of Cronenberg.

With *Shivers*, Cronenberg established what would become a common theme throughout his entire career: humans destroying themselves. He helped deliver this message through a healthy dose of strange science, weird eroticism, and impossible physical deformities, the combination of which led audiences to define his work as body horror. Indeed, Cronenberg had created a new genre.

Two years later, he released *Rabid*, which, like *Shivers*, was another grotesque and sexualized take on the zombie genre. All of Cronenberg's tenets are there: sex, violence, and mutation. That is to say: a woman injured in a motorcycle accident is given an experimental surgical procedure which leaves her with a weird, blood-sucking proboscis that hides in an orifice in her armpit. She uses this stinger to suck people's blood, which turns them into zombies. Chaos ensues. Perfectly Cronenbergian.

The next decade saw Cronenberg release a string of films which not only continued to shock and disturb viewers but also solidified him as a master of the genre he helped create. While they varied in their reception at the box office, audiences were beginning to understand the terrifying message in Cronenberg's films.

1979's *The Brood* delivered a murderous pack of child-like albino dwarfs whose creation are the result of a radical therapeutic technique known as "psychoplasms", which encourages patients with mental issues to manifest their emotions into actual physical changes to their bodies. At the time of filming, Cronenberg was going through a bitter custody battle for his daughter.

Next was *Scanners* (1981), which continued to explore the powers of the mind. Then came *Videodrome* (1983), which dove even further into mind-control (and, of course, included plenty of body transformations and titillating scenarios). Then there was *The Dead Zone* (1983), based on the Stephen King novel; a natural fit for Cronenberg at this time as it dealt with ESP.

In 1986, Cronenberg released *The Fly*, his most successful movie to date. It featured every theme and trademark Cronenberg had toyed with since *Shivers*: science, sexuality, and awful disfigurements, all which culminate in an avoidable self-destruction. He followed it up with *Dead Ringers* (1988), a semi-biographical story about twin gynecologists who create their own medical instruments. They also sleep with the same woman, get addicted to prescription medication and end up...well, self-destructing. Perfectly Cronenbergian.

Cronenberg's output in the '90s became more diverse. There was the black comic adaptation of Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1991) and a remake of the classic romantic drama *M. Butterfly* (1993). However, his adaptation of J.G. Ballard's *Crash* (1996) brought Cronenberg back to the sex and violence, and his film *eXistenZ* (1999) plays almost like a spiritual sequel to *Videodrome*.

By the 2000s, the "body horror" element of his films – the strange science, weird eroticism, and impossible physical deformities – had completely vanished. It seems that Cronenberg has shifted more towards what I like to call "soul horror", a compliment to the visceral genre he built his career on. The films he makes now don't need goopy effects or bizarre takes on consciousness. They're stripped down, bare, and focused on the tragedy of the characters. Films like *A History of Violence* (2005), wherein a family man hides a threatening secret, or the vapid, soulless lives that occupy the characters from both *Cosmopolis* (2012) and *Map to the Stars* (2014). The creatures are gone, but the self-destruction remains.

Cronenberg claims to have had a childhood fascination with insects, which he said later influenced the creepy things that would pop up in his films. That's funny because, in a way, his career is like the metamorphosis of an insect: his early stages were icky, throbbing, and hard to look at, but his recent work has shed that slimy outer layer to reveal something that looks entirely different, something mature.

I can't wait to see what David Cronenberg shows us next.



DAVID DARED ME by Danni Winn

David Paul Cronenberg has a special place in my heart. My fascination with film began early on in life, with a heavy interest in horror that developed quickly, and one of the filmmakers that made a lasting impact within my psyche, was this man. Cronenberg's first two feature-length releases, *Shivers* and *Rabid*, downright shook me. They were like nothing I had ever seen before, and when I initially experienced them, I was young and didn't quite understand all the elements at play. They simply terrified me with the visual gore, depicting the horrors of deadly parasitic orgies and an epidemic level of blood lust. I was stunned and entertained all at once, and I would never forget the filmmaker or the experiences had because of him. Initially, my love of David's work began with my interests in weird and wonderful cinema, as I found just that within these two films, and maybe even getting more than I bargained for. As time progressed, I began to admire Cronenberg for more - for his creativity, passion, talent, and tenacity. He has made some very strange shit, was determined to do so, and I adore him for it.

Back when young Cronenberg decided to switch majors in college, from Science to Literature, and continuing to feed his need to create with entering the world of filmmaking, his native Canada was not considered a haven for Horror films. Actually, not really any type of film at all. This did not deter the wannabe director and he proceeded to enroll in a 'experimental apprenticeship' focusing on independent movie-making. After two obscure short films, the Government backed Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC) decided to stand behind David, and help finance the production of his 1975 feature debut, *Shivers*. Written and Directed by Cronenberg, the movie was known by many names other than *Shivers*. It Came From Within, The Parasite Murders, The Starliner - these titles all were used at one time in conjunction with the film. It was also known that some described the movie as "repulsive, depraved, and pornographic."

The opening of *Shivers* almost immediately shows viewers a violent assault, a makeshift autopsy procedure bringing the demise of a 19 year old female resident of the luxury Starliner homes. A seemingly senseless crime, but an 'illness' strikes another resident and a gnarly parasitic upheaval over a balcony occurs, unleashing horny havoc in the high rise, tying everything together. The swanky, all inclusive homes were now Ground Zero for, at the time, the uncommon mix of gore and sex. The young experimental director unwittingly helped spawn the Body Horror subgenre and would later be known as the King of Venereal Horror, amongst other things.

Shivers is a chaotic, bloody, perverse classic. It was rather terrifying for me to witness the rampant sexual aggressiveness inside the Starliner and this film is home to a bathtub scene, which in my opinion, is as memorable as Heather Langenkamp's in the original *Nightmare on Elm Street*. The creator described how he "felt like he was on Mars" when trying to film *Shivers* and ultimately market it as a Horror film, a genre which was relatively unheard of in Canada

during the early to mid 70s. In a somewhat stifled creative climate, David boldly dared to be different. True to the spirit of independent filmmaking, *Shivers* was shot quickly and cheaply by the rookie filmmaker. The 15 days of shooting were full of learning experiences and revelations for Cronenberg, becoming aware of all the roles and demands met on a movie set. He seems to look back at his time on *Shivers* with great admiration, even the peculiar way he needed to prepare actress Sue Petrie, who played Janine Tudor, for a scene. Before several takes, she required the Director to slap her across the face prior to shooting, allowing her the ability to become emotional for the camera. David also entered into a crash course in practical effects, only to have his production utilize similar ones as in the wildly successful film, *The Exorcist*. Although Cronenberg met some successes making *Shivers*, he also met some despair. As he watched the dailies of his first film, he began to feel that maybe he shouldn't be sitting in the Director's Chair, that he was all wrong for this. After some depression and self doubt, he started to notice the dailies were gradually becoming better. Cronenberg began to learn the language of filmmaking, the equipment and techniques used to make movies, and the individuals responsible for helping ensure things go smoothly on set. Despair turned to euphoria I would assume, when despite a cold reception from Canadian critics and moviegoers, *Shivers*, impressed European audiences. It won Best Director at the acclaimed Sitges Film Festival in Spain as well as a gala screening during the 1975 Edinburgh International Film Festival.

Upon the release of *Shivers*, a scathing review was written up in Canada and printed in the 'Saturday Night' which, according to Cronenberg, "the wrong one hundred people read." This particular review created a backlash for David, subsequently causing the CFDC to distance themselves publicly from the filmmaker. But it seems secretly, they were pleased. Cronenberg's debut, at the time, was the only film earning the CFDC a monetary success and bringing any kind of notoriety. Perhaps this is how and why, closely following *Shivers*, his next film, *Rabid*, was put into production. Instead of terrifying a secluded apartment complex, David's second film unleashes terror on the entire city of Montreal, Quebec.

As *Rabid* opens, we see a couple enjoying a motorcycle ride in the country, but tragedy soon strikes, and an accident involving the two lovers, Rose (Marilyn Chambers) and Frank (Hart Read) leave them severely injured. The closest medical resources are at the Keloid Clinic for Plastic Surgery which the two are rushed off to. Sustaining minor injuries compared to Rose, Frank is able to leave the Clinic and return home after a month, but Rose remains, recuperating after an extreme experimental procedure to help save her life. And this is where shit gets weird. An unanticipated mutation morphs the young, beautiful, vibrant woman to having an insatiable need for human blood. A new stinger-like appendage appears upon her body as well, hiding

underneath her armpit. Once Rose's feedings begin, all Hell kind of breaks loose within Rabid and it scared the absolute crap out of me when I was younger. Still does in many ways to be honest.

As a kid growing up in New Jersey, I remember there being an outbreak of Rabies cases and I believe this was right around the time I first saw Rabid, too. This caused parents and school administrators alike, to invoke the fear of the disease and the treatment for it. This ailment which caused foaming at the mouth, fever, and irrational aggressive behavior in animals and people, required a series of painful injections in the abdomen - none of which sounded good to me then (or now) so Cronenberg's second directorial effort, really resonated with me. The film later astounded me with how closely the horrors depicted, paralleled real-life contemporary issues being dealt with - almost as if Rabid was a cautionary tale.

Cronenberg admitted that Rabid was on a much larger scale than anything he had ever done before, "with different complexities and layers of the script" that prompted him to reach out for help. "As a writer, I don't think about what's going to be on screen" David has said. He has also been known to say that Producer Ivan Reitman was a valuable compatriot in his endeavors, often assisting him and giving advice. Legend has it that, it was in fact Ivan who suggested the idea of Marilyn Chambers to play the part of Rose. A move that was pretty bold considering Chambers was an adult film star and Cronenberg's previous movie labelled as 'pornographic'.

No longer a Freshman in filmmaking, David really seemed to begin to fulfill his potential here in both, his writing and filming. He said, "You have to get to a point where you feel the film is necessary" and Cronenberg felt that for the first time with Rabid. He learned that "delegation was key" and utilized ways to self-budget, schedule, and input on dailies. The Director has had up to \$20 million dollars to tool around with on a movie, but he seems to relish his times on the sets of Shivers and Rabid where he had to make the absolute most of his resources. "You're watching me learn filmmaking" says David about his first two productions.

The fact that I find Cronenberg very humble and honest has only made it easier for me to look up to him. When he has talked about the 'crisis of confidence' namely among writers, it deeply touched me. To look at your creation in a cold, unattached manner is so detrimental and counterproductive - and not just isolated to the amateurs. Obviously some of the most celebrated and original screenwriters suffer from this, David Cronenberg even thought he was shit. He is inspiring, a risk taker, an innovator and never ever gave up. He wavered, but never ever gave up. His films are not easily pigeon-holed yet yield a specific branding. People can say what they will about Shivers, Rabid, and David himself - the negativity, the inability to see the progressive storytelling he possesses, the creativity of his. I understand he is not everyones cup of tea, but please stop for a moment and reminisce upon your first Cronenberg ex-


perience. It's exactly that - a fucking experience. There's a limited number of filmmakers out there, where when we watch a film from them, it's like this. You can't take that away from a creator, that they moved you so profoundly in some way that it's embedded in your memory. His films are weird, heavily layered, sexual, violent, and unique. Cronenberg is a rare storyteller in my opinion, with his creations always remaining shocking - steadfastly standing through the sands of time. David dared me to let go and be frightened on a new level while serving as a warrior for writers everywhere. I'm honored to help celebrate this pioneer of powerful genre cinema and excited for new generations to discover his work.

Catch Danni's work on <http://morbidlybeautiful.com> and follow her on Instagram @girlslikegore2

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Janet Maslin, NEW YORK TIMES

MORNING MEDITATION

Blessed are the scientists and physicians for they shall inherit the earth. They shall create institutes in their own names. The afflicted shall gather in these places, in the hills and in the cities, for healing. They shall separate themselves from the unbelievers. Wheat will be culled from chaff, sheep kept away from goats, the damned from the saved.

The needy shall receive baptism through anesthetization, salvation through surgery, sanctification through mutation. A new life can be obtained, but not through any adherence to a moral code or a rigorous, conscious behavioral modification. There is only regression, a heed to a darker call, a gentle fall backward into what we already were. We must redefine our ideas of "perfection." For we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

Hold your rosary of metal and bone between trembling fingers and acknowledge the saints.

Sing praise to Nola, the Holy Mother, and her obedient army of Id babies, wearing the sacred red hoodies of destruction. You shall know them by their gnarled faces and their falling hammers. Hail Claire, full of grace, the Lord art with thee, the trifurcate uterus, the triune goddess. Behold, the fusion of Vale and Revok, the lion lying down with the lamb, dualism come to fruition and obliteration. Raise your prayers to the parasite, the symbiote, the catalyst eliciting change beneath the skin.

Bring your wholeness to the altar, the surgical slab, the therapy couch, and allow yourself to be broken in the service of the greater good. For what does the flesh desire but more flesh? Skin for touching. Penetrating. Transforming. Consuming.

It is to decay that we are ultimately drawn, the transformation of modification, the glory of debasement. All of our secret urges lurk just under the surface, longing for form and substance. Your worship is your supplication, your surrender. We are becoming what we are.

Here endeth the lesson.

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THE HOUSE OF SKIN

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